

Commentary

NOVEMBER 2025

MEIR Y. SOLOVEICHIK
BRIAN STEWART
GIL TROY
IRINA VELITSKAYA
ADAM J. WHITE
MICHAEL A. WORONOFF

TH

ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE

MIKE BURKE
MATTHEW CONTINETTI
TOD LINDBERG
ROB LONG
JAMES B. MEIGS
JOHN PODHORETZ
CHRISTINE ROSEN
JONATHAN SCHANZER
DAN SENOR

\$5.95 US; \$7.00 CANADA



INTRODUCING A NEW CHAPTER IN THE GREAT BOOKS TRADITION



ST JOHN'S
College

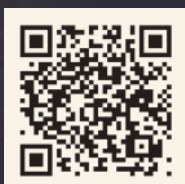
GRADUATE INSTITUTE

Master of Arts in Middle Eastern Classics

Between the fall of Rome and the rise of the European Renaissance, Jewish and Islamic thinkers served as stewards of classical knowledge—preserving, translating, and expanding upon the works of antiquity. Their philosophical, scientific, and theological writings formed an essential bridge between the ancient and modern worlds. The Master of Arts in Middle Eastern Classics at St. John's College offers a singular opportunity to engage these foundational texts and to reexamine their enduring influence on the Western intellectual tradition.

COMING FALL 2026

sjc.edu/worldclassics
gradadmissions@sjc.edu





EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Still Fighting After All These Years

JOHN PODHORETZ

COMMENTARY MAGAZINE turns 80 this month. Back in November 1945, it was a modestly funded intellectual exercise with spectacularly immodest ambitions: to explain America to the Jewish people and to explain the Jewish people to Americans.

We live in a culture now so drenched in layers of irony that the idea of a new magazine openly adopting such an ambition would trigger nothing but scorn and eye-rolling among the social media cognoscenti. If you can, though, try to imagine a world in which a small magazine *could* come into being with a purpose so lofty, especially after a war whose scale and destruction dwarfed anything the world had ever seen.

There was nothing risible about it at all.

Today, when we talk about the twin horrors of the 20th century, Communism and Fascism, we do so from a thousand different historical perspectives involving the coming of mass media, the development of unimaginably destructive weaponry, power politics, and the like. But the deepest truth of all is that these creeds that murdered more than 100 million and nearly destroyed the world's oldest people—these creeds emerged from...pamphlets. From articles, published magazine-style, in other words.

The Communist Manifesto was a pamphlet. The revolutionary work published in Russia that seeded the ground for the coming of Marxism-Leninism there seven decades later was a pamphlet titled *What Is to Be Done?* *Mein Kampf* was a book-length pamphlet. And why consider only the pamphlets that gave birth to evil? A year before the Founders would establish the moral

and philosophical framework for independence, Thomas Paine made the populist case for the American Revolution in his pamphlet *Common Sense*. And perhaps the most enduring of the world-altering pamphlets of the 19th century—the one that helped give birth to a nation whose longevity has put the lifespans of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to shame—was Herzl's *The Jewish State*. It's all of 25,000 words. To give you a sense of how long that is, this issue of COMMENTARY comprises about 60,000 words of text.

Just what can a pamphlet do? It can set people's minds on fire. In Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*, the greatest play of the 21st century, two Jewish brothers-in-law living in Vienna in 1896 have an argument about *The Jewish State*—at a party in the home of the one so eager for assimilation that he has married a non-Jew and converted. This assimilationist dismisses Herzl and his pamphlet. Why, he says, even the magazine of which Herzl is the literary editor will not review it, and no Jew in Vienna has any interest in Herzl's Zionist fantasies! His brother-in-law is not so sure. He has just returned from Galicia, the poor province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire where he was born, to visit his parents in their shtetl. And there, he reports, "everywhere we went I was asked about Herzl. His book was going around like an infection. These are people whose parents arrived with *their* parents running for their lives from the Cossacks, and mentally they're living with their bags packed. In Galicia the Jews are hated by the Poles, in Bohemia by the Germans, in Moravia by the Czechs. A Jew can be a great composer.

He can be the toast of the town. But he can't not be a Jew. In the end, if it doesn't catch up with him, it will catch up with his children. Ordinary Jews understand this.... So when someone comes along and says, 'We lost our territory and we can have it again, a territory where we're not on sufferance, where we can be what we once were. Where we can be warriors.'"

The Jews of Galicia and elsewhere outside the cosmopolitan centers of Central and Eastern Europe helped make up the population of the Yishuv, the Jewish settlement in the Holy Land, with tens of thousands emigrating around the turn of the century—summoned by a vision of the future presented to them by Herzl's pamphlet.

This is the case for intellectual argumentation. For polemic. For conflicts in words and not just on the floors of legislatures, or on streaming and cable, or on actual battlefields. The case is that the words matter because words convince. Authoritative arguments laid out with precision and care at the highest level of insight are, in the awful but catchy parlance of our day, "sticky" in a way nothing else is. Who can remember the Twitter battle of three days ago that consumed the attention of millions for a few hours? No one. That's why these battles flare up and die off, because there's always another petty fight coming down the pike to take its place.

I'm as guilty as anyone of falling prey to the dopamine rush that comes from engaging in these ludicrous and pointless skirmishes. But a dopamine rush comes, it spikes, it dissipates. An idea, a new idea, a new way of looking at something, a fresh approach when it comes to arguing *against* something—these do not dissipate. They plant themselves in our minds, and then they germinate. They provoke new thinking, either in ways that help the argument to grow and flourish, or they prune it down to its essentials, or they reveal a fatal weakness that allows you to pull it out by its roots and make sure it dies on the vine.

That is the gift of the intellectual magazine, and the profound service it provides its readers and the culture at large. The deep human impulse to make these arguments, the need to have these things out, is still everywhere and is unchanged. So new media have

arisen to make them possible. The citizen journalism practiced by bloggers has now been professionalized, by Substack, for example, and the free market of ideas supported by readers who feel they profit from these ideas has never been more vibrant. Here at COMMENTARY we play with ideas in a new way every weekday on our podcast.

But the greatest of all modern vehicles for the presentation of ideas in readily consumable but still formidable fashion is still the magazine. And there are so few of any value still left, still publishing, still thriving. Well, COMMENTARY is still here. Still publishing. And judging by the enthusiasm of our audiences, we are not only thriving at present but show every sign of continuing to thrive in the future.

I have been the editor of COMMENTARY for 16 years now, constituting one-fifth of its lifespan. The arguments and analyses that have been hosted in these pages during my tenure have spanned the Obama, Trump, Biden, and second Trump administrations; the rise of a dangerous new left activism; the emergence of a politically destabilizing populist movement on the right; the politicization of gender itself; the poisoned chalice that higher education has become; the weaponization of public health; the deserved collapse of trust in once-unassailable institutions; a psychic crisis of meaning for America's youth that seems to be related to the omnipresence of always-connected internet devices; and an explosion of Jew-

hatred without precedent in this country's history.

The Jewish state faced the worst threat in 50 years on October 7, 2023. We were all forced to note, with horror and disappointment, how voices expressing sympathy and understanding for our plight began to go quiet while the fight to speak freely as Jews and for Jews to live freely in their own nation stretched across two long years. We saw such people lose their stamina, their heart, their spine, and go supine.

But not you. Not you, reading these words. I hope we did our part to help you retain your stamina, to strengthen your heart, and to stiffen your spine. And I hope that we set your minds on fire.

May COMMENTARY live to be 120. 📌

The greatest of all modern vehicles for the presentation of ideas in readily consumable but still formidable fashion is still the magazine. And there are so few of any value still left, still publishing, still thriving. Well, COMMENTARY is still here. Still publishing. And judging by the enthusiasm of our audiences, we are not only thriving but show every sign of continuing to thrive in the future.

NO ONE SAVES MORE LIVES IN ISRAEL IN TIMES OF CRISIS.



There are many ways to support Israel and its people, but none is more transformative than a gift to Magen David Adom, Israel's emergency services system. Your gift to MDA isn't just changing lives — it's literally saving them — providing critical care and hospital transport for everyone from victims of heart attacks to rocket attacks.

Donate today at MagenDavidAdom.org or call 866.632.2763.



Israel's Emergency Services System

Commentary

November 2025 Vol. 160 : No. 4

Articles

JOHN
PODHORETZ
& DAN
SENROR

Podcasting Through Two Years of Hell

A conversation.

23

JONATHAN
SCHANZER

The New Middle East and the Challenges to Israel

The war may be over. The fighting is not.

28

TOD
LINDBERG

The Assassination Fan Base

Once horrifying, the targeted murder of prominent people now comes with a built-in subculture and cheering section.

32

MIKE
BURKE

The Murder of Charlie Kirk and the Threat to True Conservatism

The left has been exposed, but the right is in danger of following its destructive example.

39

GIL
TROY

Moynihan's Warning, the World's Folly, and Israel's Resilience

Half a century since the 'Zionism is racism' resolution, where do we stand?

44

Politics & Ideas

IRINA
VELITSKAYA

Hear Him Roar

Lions and Scavengers,
by Ben Shapiro

49

MICHAEL A.
WORONOFF

Unruly Sunstein

On Liberalism,
by Cass R. Sunstein

52

ADAM J.
WHITE

The Disciple vs. the Master

Listening to the Law,
by Amy Coney Barrett

56

BRIAN
STEWART

No Country for Young Men

Notes on Being a Man,
by Scott Galloway

58

Monthly Commentaries

1

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

John Podhoretz

Still Fighting After All These Years

6

READER COMMENTARY

Letters

on the September issue

12

TECH COMMENTARY

James B. Meigs

Begun, the Drone Wars Have

WASHINGTON COMMENTARY

Matthew Continetti

The Last American Crisis—and Ours

16

SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Christine Rosen

The Dangers of Trans

18

JEWISH COMMENTARY

Meir Y. Soloveichik

Marco Rubio in the City of David

20

HOLLYWOOD COMMENTARY

Rob Long

Jimmy Kimmel, the Old War Horse

64



READER COMMENTARY

Affirmatively Deactivated

To the Editor:

AS NAOMI Schaefer Riley's article on the College Board shows, Landscape could be used as a tool to facilitate admissions by race, even after universities had been directed to discard affirmative action ("College Board Games," September). So it was good news to hear that the College Board has since scrapped Landscape altogether. Offers of admission should be based on merit, which includes a coherent SAT essay, high school test scores, and perhaps extracurricular and

voluntary activities, regardless of economic or racial background.

CHRISTIAN MILORD
Fullerton, California



To the Editor:

AFTER reading Naomi Schaefer Riley's article about the College Board's shenanigans, it occurred to me that getting rid of affirmative action might have the salutary effect of forcing people to do what should have been done de-

CADES ago: make the public schools actually teach again. This would involve breaking the stranglehold that the teachers' unions have on schools, allowing discipline back into classrooms, and dealing with differing social norms around education. But success would obviate the perceived need for unequal treatment of applicants, which is abhorrent.

KAREN BERNSTEIN
Nashville, Tennessee



The War and the Information War

To the Editor:

THE ISRAELI military successes that Jonathan Schanzer details cannot blunt Israel's profound failure on the information front ("How Israel Can Defend Itself in the Future," September). Hamas had an information strategy that was fully operational beginning on the day of the attack. So instead of international sympathy for Israel, there's been condemnation and threats, which have put world Jewry in danger as well. In response, Israel has been speechless. The Israeli genius evident in the pager operation in Lebanon—unique in its conception, long-term preparation, and miraculous execution—is nowhere to be found when it comes to the media and the public. How can a people who built Hollywood and mastered Madison Avenue fail so spectacularly where they have always excelled? I don't understand why there was no information strategy.

LARRY W. JOSEFOVITZ
Beachwood, Ohio



Jonathan Schanzer writes:

LARRY W. Josefovitz is 100 percent right. One cannot argue with one word of his blistering critique. Israeli public relations is a hot mess, and it has been so for years. My hope now, as Israel begins to grapple with the triumphs and failures of its two-year war, is that the leadership in Jerusalem begins to

Commentary

November 2025 Vol. 160 : No. 4

JOHN PODHORETZ, *Editor*

ABE GREENWALD, *Executive Editor*

SETH MANDEL, *Senior Editor*



ELI LAKE, *Contributing Editor*

JONATHAN SCHANZER, *Contributing Editor*

BRET STEPHENS, *Contributing Editor*



CAROL MOSKOT, *Art Director*

MALKIE BECK, *Publishing Associate*



STEPHANIE ROBERTS, *Director of Operations*



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MICHAEL J. LEFFELL, *Chairman*

DANIEL R. BENSON, WILLIAM C. CROWLEY,

NINA DAVIDSON, PAUL J. ISAAC, LIZ LANGE,

JAY P. LEFKOWITZ, STEVEN PRICE,

GARY L. ROSENTHAL, MICHAEL W. SCHWARTZ,

DAN SENOR, MICHAEL WORONOFF

To send us a letter to the editor: letters@commentary.org

We will edit letters for length and content.

To make a tax-deductible donation: donate@commentary.org

For advertising inquiries: advertising@commentary.org

For customer service: service@commentary.org

Commentary (ISSN 0010-2601) is published monthly (except for a combined July/August issue) by Commentary, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization. Telephone: (212) 891-1400. Fax: (212) 891-6700. **Customer Service:** service@commentary.org or (212) 891-1400. **Subscriptions:** visit www.commentary.org. Subscribe or call (212) 891-1400 for current rates. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Subscribers will receive electronic announcements of forthcoming issues. **Single copy:** U.S. is \$5.95; Canada is \$7.00 **All back issues** are available in electronic form at commentary.org. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Commentary, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ, 07834. **Unsolicited manuscripts** must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Letters intended for publication may be edited. Indexed in Reader's Guide, Book Review Digest, and elsewhere. U.S. Newsstand Distribution by COMAG Marketing Group, 155 Village Blvd, Princeton, NJ, 08540. Printed in the USA. **Commentary** was established in 1945 by the American Jewish Committee, which was the magazine's publisher through 2006 and continues to support its role as an independent journal of thought and opinion. Copyright ©2025 by Commentary, Inc.; all rights reserved under International and Pan American Copyright Conventions.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP,
MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

Title of Publication: Commentary. 2. Publication No.: 125-220. 3. Filing Date: September 30 2025. 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly (except combined July/August issue). 5. No. of Issues Published Annually: 11. 6. Annual Subscription Price: \$108.00. 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 200 West 86th Street, Suite 1M, Manhattan, New York, NY 10024. 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: Same. 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Stephanie Roberts, 200 West 86th Street, Suite 1M, Manhattan, New York, NY 10024; Editor: John Podhoretz, 200 West 86th Street, Suite 1M, Manhattan, New York, NY 10024; Managing Editor: Abe Greenwald, 200 West 86th Street, Suite 1M, Manhattan, New York, NY 10024. 10. Owner: Commentary, Inc., 200 West 86th Street, Suite 1M, Manhattan, New York, NY 10024. 11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None. 12. Tax Status (for completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates): The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes: Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months. 13. Publication Title: Commentary. 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: October 2025. 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation. a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 11,014. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 10,877. b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail) (1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 7,904. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 7,707. (2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 0. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0. (3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 1,367. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 1,250. (4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail®): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 826. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 818. c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4)): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 10,097. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 9,775. d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail) (1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 105. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 102. (2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 0. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0. (3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 0. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0. (4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 0. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0. e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4)): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 105. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 102. f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 10,203. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 9,877. g. Copies Not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 [page #3]): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 811. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 794. h. Total (Sum of 15f and g): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 11,014. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 10,671. i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 99%. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 99%. 16. Electronic Copy Circulation: a. Paid Electronic Copies: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 11,325. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 11,058. b. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 21,422. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 20,833. c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 21,528. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 20,935. d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c X 100): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 99.5%. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 99.5%. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

Stephanie Roberts, Publisher

take a hard look at this problem. Only a clear-eyed and unflinching view of Israel's blunders in the information space will create the sense of urgency needed to improve Israel's approach to information warfare. Indeed, the first step for Israel is ad-

mitting that it has a problem. How much this issue is prioritized amid all the other post-war analysis, however, remains to be seen.



Life and Fiction

To the Editor:

JOSEPH Epstein states that compared with biography, the novel “remains, and always will remain, the more truth-bearing form” (“There Are Too Many Overweight Biographies,” September). George Sand might well agree. As she said in her novel *Metella*, “Life resem-

bles a novel more often than novels resemble life.” Life is inherently anarchic, and art, unlike nonfiction, is not bound by lockstep allegiance to facts.

GARRY APGAR
Bridgeport, Connecticut



Critical Alliances

To the Editor:

THANK YOU FOR Mike Burke's beautifully written and well-articulated discussion about liberty and national memory, nations with shared values standing together, and building alliances not through debt and dependency but through cooperation and nurturing trust (“What Japan Remembers,” September).

May we remember what we stand for. And may the Japanese remember and behave accordingly. Europeans should also recall the lessons of their history, chiefly that their freedoms cannot be taken for granted.

Thank you for drawing our attention to a quiet but critical alliance and what it means to us and the world.

JUDY STARR
Isla Morada, Florida



Mike Burke writes:

I AM DEEPLY grateful to Judy Starr for her kind words and for striking the true nerve of my essay: that liberty endures only through memory. In Europe, memory of the threat on its border has wavered.

The Russians, however, remember. The Mongols overran the Russian heartland; Napoleon and Hitler came within sight of Moscow before being driven back at a staggering cost. From that trauma grew a strategy of security through conquest—a geopolitics of insecurity shared by both the czars and the commissars: Expand until you reach the natural barriers that promise safety, the Carpathians, the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and the Pacific coast. Yet it was not NATO expansion that proved Russian insecurity right, but rather a cruel joke: Yevgeny Prigozhin (a former burglar turned hot dog seller, turned restaurateur, turned catering

Florida's Flagship

America's Torchbearer



The Hamilton School at the University of Florida is built on the pillars of a classical education. Here, truth is fearlessly pursued and world-class researchers mentor the next generation of leaders in public service, policy, and world affairs.

SEE HOW WE'RE LEADING THE WAY



UF

Hamilton School for
Classical and Civic Education
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

oligarch, turned, astonishingly, warlord-general) whose rabble of convicted criminals marched toward Moscow and plunged the regime into chaos. One suspects that Putin shudders to think what a morally reawakened, remilitarized Germany—armed to the teeth not with hot dogs, obscene amounts of vodka, and obsolete Cold War relics, but by Rheinmetall—might threaten. Yet that is precisely the reality he is bringing

into being.

“It couldn’t happen to a nicer chap,” as my grandfather used to tell me.

Europe is rearming, yet I lament that its resolve has arisen not from the lessons of this history, but from reaction—the fear of Russia on one side and of American withdrawal on the other. I would much prefer that Europe’s rearmament sprang from duty instead.

The Sweeney Freakout

To the Editor:

CHRISTINE ROSEN’S column about Sydney Sweeney and the left was spot-on (“Why Jeans Are Making Progressives Blue,” September). The progressives have learned nothing. The American Eagle ad campaign makes me realize how much I missed this kind of sensibility. Sweeney

was wearing regular boyfriend jeans, and she had the coolest car! I felt a bit released and free from the tyranny of political correctness. It made me realize how everything has become so silently oppressive. As always, thank you for your voice.

VIKI LOVE

Costa Mesa, California

Incentivizing Terrorism

To the Editor:

REGARDING Meir Y. Soloveichik’s column on the Palestinian Authority’s terrorist-reward system, it’s worth noting that the PA gets what it incentivizes (“We Will No Longer Tolerate ‘Pay for Slay,’” September). And what it gets is not preparation for a state that wants to live in peace with Israel. And the PA is not coy about what it’s doing. In February of this year, PA head Mahmoud Abbas said before the Fatah

Revolutionary Council, “If we have only a single penny left, it will go to the prisoners and the martyrs.... They are more honorable than all of us.” Chief Justice John Roberts has rightly recognized that Palestinian leadership needs to be held accountable for its murderous policies.

JULIA LUTCH

Davis, California

Myth-Busting

To the Editor:

I FOUND Wilfred Reilly’s review of Jason L. Riley’s *The Affirmative Action Myth* eye-opening and brave (“Myth Directed,” September). It explained several myths that have scarcely been scrutinized or debated in the mainstream media. Reilly explained each clearly and provided evidence to support his claims.

It was refreshing and surprising to read a new (to me) perspective on affirmative action and see the receipts that demonstrate its failure. I say it was brave because I shudder to think of how many will accuse the book’s author, or Reilly for reviewing it, of being racist or supporting the “white man good” narrative. It has become an act of bravery to state facts drawn from careful research and analysis, especially when this supports a conclusion that the mainstream media and woke left do not want to hear. This is the kind of analysis and interpretation that will help inform which policies need to be changed. I applaud COMMENTARY for providing honest and thoughtful articles like this.

LAURA CLARK

Cincinnati, Ohio



YOU DESERVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH...

Facts Shatter Gaza Genocide Lies

Of all the lies told by Israel's enemies, the slander of genocide is the greatest falsehood—refuted by the word's meaning and all facts. Why do they repeat it?

Despite any factual evidence that Israel intends to or actually is systematically eliminating Gaza's population—and despite Israel's unmatched efforts to spare and even feed enemy civilians—dozens of media, politicians and activists still spread the Israel genocide blood libel.

What are the facts?

Following Hamas's savage October 7 massacre and kidnapping of innocent Israeli children, families, young people and elderly, the accusation of genocide against Israel has become a hateful rallying cry. However, as a preponderance of facts prove, Israel's conduct of the war against Hamas in Gaza is entirely legal and in no way violates the UN Genocide Convention.

What is genocide? "Genocide" defines "acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." The Jews of Europe are the best-known victims of genocide. Hitler's Germany tried to eliminate the Jewish people—killed six million for their "crime" of being Jewish. Likewise, the Cambodian genocide (1981-83) killed 1.5-2 million people—some 25% of Cambodia's population. The Rwandan Genocide (1994) killed 800,000 to 1 million people in 100 days, and the Darfur Genocide (2003 to present) has claimed 200,000 to 400,000 deaths. Critical to the definition of genocide is specific intent to murder or physically displace a population group (not merely its individual members). *Thus, any given war between two parties, regardless of death counts, cannot necessarily be called genocide.*

Is Israel intentionally trying to eliminate the Gazan people? There's zero evidence that Israel has intentionally targeted innocent Gazan Palestinians. Indeed, Israel's attacks on its enemies uniformly target Hamas terrorists, who generally hide in hospitals, mosques and schools, using Gaza's citizens as human shields. To avoid harming innocents, the IDF consistently gives warnings to civilians of impending attacks, using phone and SMS, leaflets, social media and "roof-knocking." Israel also issues evacuation warnings prior to battles in populated areas. Finally, Israel facilitates delivery of thousands of tons of medicines, food and other essentials to sustain the enemy population in Gaza—unheard of in modern warfare. These actions prove irrefutably that Israel does not intend to destroy the Gazan people. No genocide.

Are Palestinians victims of genocide? In the Gaza War, an estimated 60,034 Gazans have been killed as of August 2024, of which an estimated 24,014 (40%) were males of combat age (18–59). Other estimates place the percentage of deaths of Gazan males aged 13-55 to be 72%, or 43,224 deaths. No surprise, then,

that the ratio of civilians to combatants in Gaza is much lower than in comparable wars. Whereas the civilian-fighter ratio in Gaza is estimated to be as high as 1.5:1, the average ratio in urban warfare worldwide, according to the UN, is 9:1 civilians to fighters. This ratio alone destroys the genocide argument.

Palestinian-Arabs have multiplied with no interference from Israel: Palestinian population at Israel's birth in 1948 was about 1.3 million—today it's about 6.8 million, of which some two million are Israeli Arab citizens. Such robust population growth also refutes accusations of genocide. Even in Gaza itself, despite the war, Gaza's population—measured by births vs. violent deaths—has actually increased. Estimates by such organizations as the United Nations Population Fund project births in Gaza from October 7, 2023 to the present at about 124,245. Contrast that with violent deaths estimated at about 75,200

over the same period by the independent Gaza Mortality Survey: Using births vs. violent deaths, Gaza actually experienced a net gain in population—the opposite effect of a genocide.

Why do Israel's enemies—against all evidence—repeat the antisemitic blood libel of genocide? Instead of praising Israel's efforts to save civilian lives, increasing members of the "international community" employ the genocide accusation in the same manner blood libels were used to discredit, delegitimize and physically attack Jews over the centuries. Those who oppose Israel's existence cannot use honest facts to convince people of good will that Israel is evil. In fact, Israel wants peace and has offered it many times to Palestinians over 77 years. Yet, the Palestinians have greeted these offers with thousands of terrorist attacks, killing some 5,450 Israeli civilians.

Time to refute the Israel genocide liars. False accusations of genocide are attempts to delegitimize the Jewish state, demonize Jews and destroy Israel. These tactics perfectly fit the globally accepted definition of antisemitism. Those who attack Israel with this falsehood fully deserve the label of antisemite.

This message has been published and paid for by

FLAME

Facts and Logic About the Middle East
P.O. Box 3460, Berkeley, CA 94703
James Sinkinson, President
Gerardo Joffe (z"l), Founder

FLAME is a tax-exempt, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Its purpose is the research and publication of facts regarding developments in the Middle East and exposing false propaganda that might harm the United States, Israel and other allies in the region. Your tax-deductible contributions are welcome.

To receive free FLAME updates, visit our website: www.factsandlogic.org



TECH COMMENTARY

Begun, the Drone Wars Have

JAMES B. MEIGS

JUST A DOZEN YEARS AGO, small drones were mostly high-tech playthings for hobbyists. DIYers assembled backyard drones from kits, while a handful of U.S. start-ups—including 3D Robotics, a company launched by former *Wired* magazine editor Chris Anderson—were developing quadrotors for photographers and tech buffs. At the same time, the Chinese company DJI Technology was entering the U.S. market with its inexpensive and easy-to-use Phantom drones.

Then, small drones were mostly deployed for fun or used by small businesses like wedding photographers and realtors. Anderson and a few others saw that drones would be valuable in more critical applications, such as high-tech agriculture and search-and-rescue operations. A few people also foresaw that small, hard-to-spot drones would someday be useful on the battlefield. But Pentagon officials and military contractors alike showed only modest interest in the new class of small airborne gadgets that seemed more akin to toys than to weapons of war.

While the Pentagon slept, the civilian market for small drones boomed. DJI undercut all competitors with its cheap, highly capable quadrotors. Based in Shenzhen, China, the company has several advantages over U.S. manufacturers. One is relatively low-cost labor, of course. But DJI also has easy access to all the high-tech components needed to make a consumer drone: small, high-torque motors; powerful, lightweight batteries; microchips; GPS sensors; digital cameras, and more. China leads the world in manufacturing all those items—right down to the rare earth elements, lithium, cobalt, and other raw materials critical for modern electronics.

By 2016, Anderson and 3D Robotics recognized

that they couldn't compete with the flood of imports. The company stopped producing consumer drones and pivoted to developing software for more advanced drone applications, including autonomous operation. In this move, 3D Robotics was following a pattern established by Apple and other American tech companies. Typically, U.S. firms invent new tech products and develop the software they run on, but the hands-on manufacturing usually gets done in China and other lower-wage countries. Often, as in Apple's case, those manufacturers are suppliers. Sometimes, they wind up being competitors. (Today, DJI produces about 90 percent of the small consumer drones sold around the world.) At the time, not too many people noticed that the U.S. was losing its nascent niche of domestic drone manufacturers. Fewer still thought the trend might have geopolitical implications.

Then came Ukraine.

It's a truism that revolutionary shifts in military technology are rarely appreciated until they've been painfully revealed in battle. World War I showed the crushing power of heavy artillery and the need for armored vehicles. Pearl Harbor and Midway proved that aircraft carriers, not battleships, would henceforth rule the seas. Today, the next era of warfare has become visible on the ravaged plains of Ukraine.

In 2022, when Russia launched the current invasion, it sent airborne troops and columns of armor against the Ukrainian capital of Kiev. These were classic tactics. But those attacks bogged down, and the Ukrainian military soon began finding ways to compensate for its relative lack of heavy armor and artillery shells. Off-the-shelf DJI drones proved useful in surveilling Russian troop movements. Then, savvy Ukrainian technicians began adapting first-person-view (FPV) drones to carry modified grenades and other explosive payloads. Deliv-

JAMES B. MEIGS is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and the former editor of *Popular Mechanics*.

ered with pinpoint precision, these tiny weapons can take out tanks and armored personnel carriers, or target individual soldiers on foot or motorcycle. In 2024 alone, such attacks contributed to Russia's reported loss of over 3,600 tanks and nearly 9,000 armored vehicles. Russian troops have suffered an estimated 1 million casualties in the war so far. About 80 percent of those losses have been inflicted by drones, according to one estimate.

"We are inventing a new way of war," one Ukrainian drone builder told *New Yorker* military reporter Dexter Filkins. The Russians, with their vastly greater resources, are catching up fast, deploying myriad varieties of drones and copying every Ukrainian innovation. Both sides fill the skies with electronic-warfare transmissions meant to jam communications between FPV drones and their hidden pilots. The war has become a lightning-fast technological ratchet. As a result, the Russia-Ukraine battle space today looks like nothing a 20th-century military expert could have imagined. Tanks and other armor are rendered nearly useless. Squads of infantrymen can barely move. With so many eyes in the sky, any soldier or vehicle moving in the open will likely be targeted and destroyed within minutes.

Meanwhile, inexpensive drones allow each nation to extend its destructive reach far into the other's territory. Earlier this year, Ukraine managed to deploy over 100 drones close to air bases thousands of miles inside Russia. The attack damaged or destroyed at least 20 of the country's virtually irreplaceable strategic bombers. The entire operation probably cost less than a single American cruise missile. And this is all happening even before swarms of autonomous, AI-controlled drones enter the fray in force. Ukrainian engineers are working on those, too. "It's a totally DIY-drones conflict," Anderson told me.

The lessons from Ukraine are clear—and ominous. The next major war will likely be won by whichever combatant has the industrial capacity to manufacture, deploy—and continuously improve—millions of drones per year. That leaves the U.S. in a scary position for two reasons: First, the Pentagon's weapons-procurement system is famously slow and backward-looking, while the prime contractors who build our ships, planes, and other hardware seem to grow more lethargic each year. Second, we simply don't have a civilian industry capable of producing large numbers of inexpensive drones. During World War II, the U.S. had a huge industrial base that was able to pivot to military production. But in this century, America's homegrown drone industry never got off the ground.

This will make things awkward if we ever face a war with China. It's not like the Pentagon can call up DJI and say, "We'd like 10 million of your very best drones, please." And the problem goes deeper than drones alone.

As economist Noah Smith and others have pointed out, the ability to produce drones depends on an entire ecosystem of components, raw materials, software, and expertise. Smith calls it the Electric Tech Stack. The tech-stack concept is borrowed from the world of software, where it describes the layers of technology and capabilities—databases, programming languages, coding expertise—needed for a piece of software to work. All advanced industries rely on some version of this stack. Nineteenth-century steelmaking, for example, required coal and iron mines, railroads and ships to deliver those inputs, Bessemer blast furnaces, expert metallurgists to run them, and more. Without the whole stack, there would be no steel.

The tech stack needed to build drones includes batteries, high-performance motors, power electronics, and various chips for telemetry, communication, and so on. None of these components are terribly expensive today. In fact, unlike conventional, high-grade military equipment—a Predator drone, say—this stuff is all mass-produced for consumer products. And that's a problem. The U.S. has gotten in the habit of outsourcing this kind of mass production. Ditto for the raw materials that go into batteries, motors, and other components. Right now, the U.S. has only one working mine producing the rare earth elements vital to cutting-edge electronics. According to a 2022 report, China controls most of the world's rare earth mining and processing, and accounts for 92 percent of rare earth magnet production.

There's a reason analysts describe these as "chokehold" technologies. "If you want to defend your country, you *simply have no choice* but to secure the Electric Tech Stack," Smith writes. And reliable access to tech-stack materials and components isn't just important for making drones. Our technological world is changing, shifting away from fuel-driven machines and toward precise, electrically powered systems. We see this trend in everything from cars and backyard tools to aviation and manufacturing. Ryan McEntush, a partner at the Andreessen Horowitz investment firm, explains: "Electrified systems, built on batteries, power electronics, and high-torque motors, are more efficient, more precise, and more responsive to software." The same inputs and skills needed to build drones will also be crucial to mastering this next wave of innovation. As Smith notes, "If you have the ability to make drones domestically, you can also manufacture an increasingly large percentage of everything else."

So, how do we bring this ecosystem back to U.S. shores? After all, we invented many of these technologies in the first place. The easy answer is that we need some kind of industrial policy to prop up American ventures, and we need tariffs to handicap foreign competitors. As a free-market true believer, I'm leery of this path, and not

just philosophically but practically. Back in the 1920s, Congress passed the Jones Act, which mandates that only America-made, -owned, and -operated ships can carry goods between U.S. ports. The act was intended to protect our domestic shipbuilding industry. The law utterly failed at that goal, but it imposes huge, unnecessary costs on U.S. consumers and businesses to this day. Similarly, presidents from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush have imposed tariffs on steel imports. These actions didn't bring back the glory days of American steel hegemony, but such tariffs continue to hurt *other* U.S. manufacturers by raising the cost of one of their key inputs. In short, crude attempts to protect U.S. industries usually backfire.

I asked Chris Anderson whether there were any policies that might have helped companies like his keep drone manufacturing in North America. He gave me a two-pronged answer: 3D Robotics aimed to supply drones to high-tech farmers and other commercial users who needed systems that could fly autonomously and travel beyond the operator's line of sight. But FAA regulations, which were geared more toward toys than tools, held them back. "The whole point of what we developed—flying robots—was that they could go beyond remote-control or piloted aircraft, multiplying human potential by operating on their own or at least in a many-to-one ratio with a human operator," he told me in an email. Even today, FAA regulators allow such operations only in limited trial projects. As long as such advanced applications remain in regulatory limbo, there's "no real path to scale," Anderson said.

In other words, the best way to help U.S. drone makers and other innovators isn't to offer handouts to certain, politically fashionable businesses. It's to remove the regulatory barriers that hold back the smartest companies. (In a Manhattan Institute report earlier this year, I argued that simplifying FAA rules and other regulations is also the key to helping our homegrown space-launch industry thrive.)

Anderson's company also had some frustrating talks with the Department of Defense about military applications for drones. When it comes to fostering a domestic drone industry suitable for defense, "I don't think tariffs or bans would have really helped much," he said. "What we needed was strong demand signals." At that time, the Pentagon's approach to drones reflected its time-honored dedication to "fighting the last war." It was most comfortable working with established military contractors building small quantities of expensive weapons systems. The notion of deploying vast numbers of small, cheap, highly expendable weapons didn't fit that paradigm. Since then, the war in Ukraine has been a wake-up call, Anderson notes, and "may finally lead to

an embrace of what we were pitching." Sadly, a decade of progress has been lost.

What if, instead, the Pentagon had fostered a bottom-up approach? Beginning in 2004, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) sponsored a series of competitions to find the best autonomous-vehicle tech. Winning teams won modest cash prizes. Those contests helped jump-start the U.S. AV industry. NASA took a related approach two decades ago when it invited private launch companies to propose new space vehicles to carry cargo, and eventually astronauts, to the International Space Station. The winning proposals—including one from the then-unproven SpaceX—won grants to help develop their vehicles. Since then, NASA's resulting commercial space program has saved taxpayers billions. The Pentagon could have launched a similar contest to surface the best emerging military drone technology. In fact, it still can.

Anderson envisions DARPA-style competitions pitting teams against each other, "drone swarms on one side, and counter-drone technologies on the other." A series of such face-offs would reveal the best technology on each side, and the winning companies would then receive significant funding to keep developing their platforms. NASA's commercial space experiment helped it partially break its dependence on bloated legacy aerospace contractors. The Pentagon could do the same by catalyzing entrepreneurial start-ups instead of pouring more money into today's broken procurement system.

The potential to win Defense Department contracts would "trigger the resumption of venture capital funding big time," Anderson predicts. It would also have spin-off effects. NASA's commercial space program helped spur the now-booming U.S. private space industry, which in turn attracts billions in private investment. An entrepreneurial military drone program could do the same for the U.S. drone industry—and for the Electric Tech Stack more broadly.

Developing a competitive market for military drone technology is only one step in building an American Electric Tech Stack. In fact, reforms are needed at all levels of the stack. For example, we must streamline the regulations that hold back the mining and refining of critical raw materials. We also need to make it easier to manufacture microchips and other high-tech components—not by offering billions in subsidies, as the Biden-era CHIPS Act does, but by reducing the regulatory and legal burdens that make it so hard to build factories in this country. We don't need an old-school industrial policy to bring back the tech stack. We do need the government to step forward as a *customer* for the best new technologies. NASA proved that this approach can work. Now the Pentagon needs to follow suit. 🚀



ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL *Opportunity?*

Tax changes are coming next year. Opening a donor-advised fund account with DonorsTrust before December 31 can simplify your year-end giving —and help you maximize the tax benefits.

Your Vision. Your Values. Your Impact.

**Visit [DonorsTrust.org/Commentary](https://donorstrust.org/Commentary) to download
"A Conservative's Guide to 2025 Year-End Giving"**

Donor-Advised Funds
Philanthropic Guidance
Legacy Protection

DonorsTrust
The Community Foundation for Liberty

DT Philanthropic Services
703-535-3563
donorstrust.org



WASHINGTON COMMENTARY

The Last American Crisis—and Ours

MATTHEW CONTINETTI

IN THE LATE SUMMER of 1973, the U.S. Information Agency sent COMMENTARY editor Norman Podhoretz on a lecture tour of the Indo-Pacific. He began in New Delhi, where he visited his friend Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then serving as ambassador to India. From there he proceeded to Australia, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan. At each stop, he met with dignitaries, lunched with intellectuals, and delivered prepared remarks.

I recently came across the text of his speech. Reprinted later that year in the Australian journal *Quadrant*, Podhoretz's words are not just relevant today. They reaffirm the mission of COMMENTARY, 80 years old with this issue.

Podhoretz's biographer, Thomas Jeffers, notes that the Asia trip took place in a bleak setting. Podhoretz still considered himself a centrist liberal, but the Democratic Party had turned to radicalism by nominating South Dakota Senator George McGovern as its presidential candidate in the previous election.

McGovern was the avatar of what Podhoretz called the "new liberalism," an ideology of repudiation that indicted America for inequality, imperialism, and racism. For several years, Podhoretz had been using

the pages of COMMENTARY as artillery in an intellectual war against the new liberalism's foundational ideas. It was a rearguard action.

But Podhoretz had not yet joined forces with conservatives. The man who had defeated McGovern in a landslide, President Richard Nixon, was consumed by investigations into the Watergate break-in. As Nixon's domestic stature weakened, so did America's strength abroad. Deterrence failed. Enemies noticed.

Toward the end of Podhoretz's trip, on Judaism's holiest day, Egypt and Syria invaded Israel and launched the Yom Kippur War. Three days after that, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned after pleading no contest to tax evasion. The nation and world were caught between a Democratic Party in an anti-American fervor, and a Republican Party reeling from scandal. Pessimism reigned.

Hence Podhoretz's lecture title: "Is America Falling Apart?" His answer was contrarian. Not only was America holding together, he argued, in some ways it was also stronger than before. The American people weren't responsible for inflation, protest, and Watergate, he said. America's elites were. Liberals had lost their identity and no longer knew what they stood for. And conservatives had lost their self-confidence—their sense of morality, their identification with law and order. Neither side was able to lead.

Once, Podhoretz said, liberals had championed economic growth, internationalism, and racial integration. By the '70s, however, liberalism had abandoned

This is MATTHEW CONTINETTI's final Washington Commentary column. He has been a columnist with the magazine for 11 years. We wish him Godspeed and ask him to join our continuing efforts to keep the candle burning.

all these positions. Pro-growth economic policy had been replaced by environmentalism and consumer protection. Interventionist foreign policy had warped into the neo-isolationism of McGovern's "Come Home, America" campaign slogan. The idea of color blindness and the dream of integration had been delegitimized by affirmative action, riots, assassinations, and crime.

Nixon Republicans, meanwhile, presented themselves as responsible leaders who could navigate the turbulent waters of Vietnam and domestic unrest. And Nixon had been successful in withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam and in reaching an accord with the Communist North Vietnamese. But his involvement in Watergate stained the reputation of both his administration and the GOP. Nixon embraced the methods of one of his heroes, former French President Charles de Gaulle—heavy-handed executive orders and intrusive central government. It worked better in the original French.

Yet America endured. The paradox of Watergate, Podhoretz said, was that it strengthened U.S. institutions by reminding Americans of their ability to restrain arbitrary power. Podhoretz also took solace in the fact that the American people were richer, better educated, and more tolerant of ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual difference than before. They were proud of their free society—"the kind of society," Podhoretz wrote, "that used to be called a bourgeois democracy."

The nation was in crisis because liberal and conservative elites had, for different reasons, lost their faith in bourgeois democracy and in the public. McGovern's new liberalism sought to swap America's institutions for socialist bureaucracy. Nixon's Gaullism, in pursuit of stability, evaded or violated constitutional guardrails. Both parties ran afoul of the traditional values and habits and common sense of the American people. Chaos was the result.

But it wouldn't last. Podhoretz ended on a hopeful note. The collapse of American leadership, he said, "is a necessary precondition to the development of a governing elite which, as is proper to the workings of a truly democratic society, follows as much as it leads, and leads precisely out of its superior capacity to articulate and make coherent what the people feel and think and want." Indeed, by the end of the decade, voters had taken the first steps toward better governance. They inaugurated a new political era. The nation avoided Podhoretz's worst fears of Communist victory and

American decline.

Will we be so lucky? It's impossible to read Podhoretz's address without seeing parallels between 1973 and 2025. George McGovern's new liberalism has reappeared, with a sharpened anti-Semitic edge, in Zohran Mamdani's democratic socialism. Nixon's Gaullism struts across the Ultimate Fighting Championship stage, fashionably dressed, in the figure of Donald Trump. Russia murders Ukrainian civilians and menaces Europe. Radical Islam's war against Israel and the West inspires a global wave of violent anti-Semitism. Communist China was still recovering from the Cul-

tural Revolution when Podhoretz traveled to Asia. Now it's a global superpower with designs on democratic Taiwan.

At home, Americans distrust their institutions. The rising generation devalues patriotism. It's suspicious of the American dream, of upward mobility, of family and faith. The American people, too, seem coarser than they were half a century ago—more given to public displays of vulgarity, lewdness, rudeness, and random violence. For every similarity between the early '70s and now, there is a postmodern twist—social media, podcasts, AI, Covid, mass immigration, transgenderism—that makes the current situation stranger and more menacing.

And yet, buried under layers of luxury and self-doubt, America's political and economic institutions still hum with energy. Most Americans still exhibit the bourgeois democratic values that have sustained the nation on its journey to greatness. If our current political leadership doesn't seem quite up to the task of both articulating and executing popular desires, a new generation is waiting in the wings. These new leaders will have personal and political faults of their own, of course. Leaders always do. But they may also be better suited for the task ahead. Better equipped to defend what's best in America.

The exceptional nature of this country's founding, its connection to the greatest glories of Judaism and Christianity and Western civilization, endows it with remarkable recuperative powers that are continually at work. That is why Norman Podhoretz was able to conclude that America was in better shape than it looked. COMMENTARY exists to remind Americans of this noble inheritance. COMMENTARY is here to rebuke those intellectuals and politicians so eager to defame and demean the values, systems, and policies that promote freedom and prosperity. Eight decades later, the job isn't finished. It never is. 📖➡️

**The paradox of
Watergate,
Norman Podhoretz
said, was that
it strengthened
U.S. institutions
by reminding
Americans of their
ability to restrain
arbitrary power.**



SOCIAL COMMENTARY

The Dangers of Trans

CHRISTINE ROSEN

NICHOLAS ROSKE, who plotted to murder Justice Brett Kavanaugh and other conservatives on the high court to prevent the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, was sentenced in October to eight years in prison by U.S. District Judge Deborah Boardman. The sentence shocked most people who were paying attention to the case, since federal prosecutors had urged a 30-year term. They noted Roske's elaborate planning and preparation, his purchase of a knife, a gun, and burglary tools, and his clear intent to assassinate the justice—thwarted only by the presence of law enforcement at Kavanaugh's home, which prompted Roske to turn himself in.

Why did Boardman do it? She explained her remarkable leniency by noting Roske's recent change from the name under which he was charged, Nicholas, to "Sophie," and his desire to transition to female. As the *New York Times* reported, "The judge also said that a lower sentence was warranted because of an executive order issued by President Trump mandating that transgender women be held at male-only federal facilities, which she said could interfere with her [*sic*] continuing to receive gender transition care." Boardman added she was happy that Roske's transition was now being accepted by his family.

That Roske's opportunistic decision to identify as female was rewarded by a federal judge with a soft landing is another data point in a growing list of examples of how trans ideology is challenging most Americans'

notions of justice and fairness.

The tolerance of Americans for minorities of many types—religious, racial, ethnic, sexual—is a commendable part of our national character. But something significant is happening to Americans when it comes to the demands being made on them to acquiesce to the worldview of the trans movement.

Unlike earlier activists who have sought to expand acceptance of minorities, trans activists have made little effort to persuade most Americans that their cause is either rational or just. They and their apologists have denied or ignored evidence of its active harms, particularly to children and women. And they have increasingly been demanding not simply equal treatment, but special treatment.

For some time, trans activists and their supporters on the cultural left have treated their movement as a fait accompli. If Americans could accept homosexuality and, eventually, gay marriage, why not trans people? After yoking their cause to the hard-won effort to expand acceptance of gay and lesbian Americans—adding the T and the Q to the LGB—trans activists proceeded to advance their cause in new directions. Civil liberties organizations such as the ACLU made acceptance of trans ideology the new litmus test for inclusion. Educators and progressive lawmakers and the mainstream media quickly fell into line.

Even as all this was happening, most Americans harbored reasonable doubts about the claims of trans activists. When Americans raised questions or expressed concerns about the long-term health effects of administering experimental hormone treatment to children,

CHRISTINE ROSEN is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

or the unfairness of allowing men to compete against women in sports, or the violation of women's right to privacy in bathrooms and locker rooms, they were not met with a willingness to engage and debate the merits. No, they came under attack as bigots and transphobes.

An increasing number of Americans now express greater support in polls for protections for girls and women from men who "identify as female" and insist on having access to women-only spaces such as locker rooms and bathrooms. Pew found that 66 percent of Americans now support laws and policies that "require trans athletes to compete on teams that match their sex assigned at birth" and 56 percent support a total ban on "health care professionals from providing care related to gender transitions for minors."

Since Donald Trump was reelected president in 2024, in part by promising to ensure that law and policy reflected these majority views, the cultural left and the Democratic Party have had an opportunity to reflect on how their capture by trans ideology has affected their electoral hopes and how they might change course in the future.

Some have tried to rewrite the recent past to serve their own sense of moral certitude. *New York Times* podcaster Ezra Klein had on Representative Sarah McBride, a biological man who lives as a trans woman, to lament the fact that the "conversation" about trans rights has moved in the wrong direction. This is deliberately disingenuous. That supposed "conversation" has never taken place; in fact, the cultural left, boosted by Klein's own employer, has done its best to suppress dissent and ignore legitimate concerns about safety and fairness for women and girls.

Later, in an interview with Ta-Nehisi Coates, Klein complained, "We've just begun to lose that argument [about trans rights] terribly—and that has put people in real danger." Coates, who once said that the firefighters who died on 9/11 at the World Trade Center "were not human to me," captured the cultural left's attitude. He saddled his moral high horse and declared, "If you think it is OK to dehumanize people, then conversation between you and me is probably not possible." This was in the course of a discussion about the assassination of Charlie Kirk, allegedly committed by a man in a relationship with another man "in transition." Kirk's alleged assassin said he had taken action because he was "sick of the hate." While noting that "a huge amount of the country, a majority of the country" believes differently from him and Coates, Klein simply declared that those are people "we would see as fundamentally and morally wrong."

Democratic politicians have also doubled down. In her recent memoir, failed presidential candidate

Kamala Harris defended her stance on using taxpayer money to pay for gender transition for prisoners and illegal immigrants: "There was no way I was going to go against my very nature and turn on transgender people," she wrote.

Likewise, mainstream media outlets doggedly insist on conforming to trans ideology. NBC News reported the sentencing of Kavanaugh's would-be assassin as "Woman sentenced to 8 years for attempting to assassinate Brett Kavanaugh" and referred to Roske throughout as "Sophie." Both the *Wall Street Journal* and CNN also refused to correctly identify Roske's sex, referring to him instead as the "person" who plotted to kill Kavanaugh.

And then there is the increase in the number of episodes of political violence committed by trans people, as well as more violent rhetoric by trans activists who call for armed resistance to those who oppose them. Charlie Kirk's alleged assassin is only one such person; at least two school shooters in the past couple of years have "reassigned" their own genders.

At the state and local level, officials in liberal enclaves continue to refuse to contend with the damaging consequences of their trans policies. In Fairfax County, Virginia, a male registered sex offender has repeatedly exploited the county's transgender policies to expose himself to girls and women in the locker rooms and bathrooms of multiple public-pool facilities. Richard Cox "told Fairfax County rec center staff that he identified as a transgender woman and, per the county's transgender policy, was permitted to use the women's locker rooms," the *New York Post* reported. Nearby Arlington County's public schools also allow people to use the public facilities based on their "chosen gender identity," and the county has fielded multiple complaints of men exposing themselves to women and girls there.

Americans may be tolerant, but not of radical claims that human beings can change the basic realities of human biology, and not of things that have proven actively harmful to women and children. It is not bigotry, but the trans movement's own intransigence, that has led us to this place.

And it is not right that a man who sought to assassinate a Supreme Court justice for political reasons should get a pass from a judge in part to ease his path to a gender change. That is not tolerance; it is madness. Scandals like the Boardman sentence can turn into hinge moments in history. They can open the eyes of those who have not been paying close attention to the ways elite decision-makers can easily cease seeing reason and begin living in dangerous fantasy—and by acting as they do, they can turn their dangerous fantasies into catastrophic realities for the rest of us. 🏳️🚫



JEWISH COMMENTARY

Marco Rubio in the City of David

MEIR Y. SOLOVEICHIK

IN SEPTEMBER, Secretary of State Marco Rubio delivered one of the most meaningful American speeches in recent memory. Rubio was in Jerusalem, and the setting was dramatic. In the wake of all that has transpired since—the assault on Gaza City, the negotiations to end the war, the arrangement for the return of the hostages—Rubio’s remarks have been overlooked, and perhaps understandably so. Nevertheless, it is vital that his speech not be forgotten by Americans, because though it was delivered in Jerusalem, it was really about America—about the uniqueness of our founding and history and what the 250th anniversary of the United States should mean to all of us.

The speech was framed around Zionism in its most literal sense, given that it was delivered inside Zion itself. “Zion” is the name that King David assigned to the mountain where his capital Jerusalem was founded, where his psalms were written, and where his dream of a Temple was given expression—a site known, then as now, as the “City of David.”

Rubio had come with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to attend the inauguration of the opening

of the “Pilgrimage Road”—a path by which hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, millennia ago, ascended to the Temple from the pool of Siloam within David’s city to Judaism’s holiest site. Its discovery and excavation are among the triumphs of archaeology in our time. The road is, one might say, the ultimate reminder of who the “indigenous people” of Zion really are, demonstrating as it does continuity between their presence there at least 3,000 years ago and the presence of 7 million Jews in the Jewish state today.

Rubio implicitly referenced this fact in the opening of his remarks, making mention of America’s upcoming anniversary and how America was actually “young” compared to the nation whose story is represented by where he stood. He then turned to the meaning of the Founding and what set America apart.

The United States was founded on a powerful idea, defined not by geography, ethnicity, or anything else. It was founded on the very powerful principle that the rights of mankind come from their creator.

These are words whose constant reiteration is necessary and proper, especially from a Republican administration, since we are now hearing from some affiliated with the conservative movement that Amer-

MEIR Y. SOLOVEICHIK is the rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City and the director of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University.

ica is *not* really defined by an idea. The secretary of state was not, of course, saying that America is utterly disconnected from the circumstances of its location. Rather, he was asserting that, at its core, America is a covenantal nation, defined by a set of principles. And by linking America's more recent founding to the ancient and modern capital of Israel, he implicitly reminded us that, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks put it, "America and Israel, ancient and modern, are the two supreme examples of societies constructed in conscious pursuit of an idea."

Appropriately, Rubio then turned in his remarks to the site where he stood and gave voice to Isaiah's vision of all the earth learning from biblical teachings in God's sacred city that "from Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." It was only because of this word of God, Rubio argued, that the American idea came to be enunciated.

It was here that God fulfilled his promise to his people. It was here that the lessons that formed the base rock and the foundations of our laws, of the principles upon which we decide what is right and what is wrong, was built upon. If you think about the things that today we, in civilized societies, use as rules to govern us, these things did not come because good people wrote them. They came because they were rooted in ancient teachings. For deep inside of us, we all know that we were created for a purpose and for a reason, that our dignity comes from our creator.

This, too, is deeply significant. There are those affiliated with the right today who describe the notion that "all men are created equal" as a paradigm of Enlightenment liberalism utterly unrooted in the ancient past and therefore unworthy of being placed at the locus of American exceptionalism. Rubio reminded us that the notion of human equality did not emerge ex nihilo from the mind of European philosophers, or from the sages of Athens. The latter city may have been a democracy in a certain sense, but its greatest philosophers took human inequality for granted. The embrace by America's founders of an equality "endowed by

our Creator" was rooted in a bond to the Bible, to the concept that human beings are created in God's image. American exceptionalism, Rubio was arguing, is bound up with the biblical teachings, and therefore with the sacred site where he was speaking.

This helps explain why those, from the progressive left to the woke right, who seek to undermine the creedal nature of the American story also seek to foster hatred against the Jewish people and against Israel. It was therefore fitting that Rubio, in conclusion, pointed out to all those assembled that the City of David itself

is a reminder that, while Jew-haters may fulminate, they will ultimately fail:

The embrace by America's founders of an equality 'endowed by our Creator' was rooted in a bond to the Bible, to the concept that human beings are created in God's image. American exceptionalism, Marco Rubio was arguing, is bound up with the biblical teachings, and therefore with the City of David, the sacred site where he was speaking.

To stand here today on the very road where, not 2,000 years ago, so many from everywhere ventured to fulfill that desire to be closer to the creator is a humbling and honoring experience. As you go through the layers of history, you realize that all the civilizations that conquered this city, all the ones who tore it down and built on top, are all gone. The Roman Empire is no more, nor any of the others that sought to conquer and rule this land. But one people remain. They have returned. For God's promise is eternal, and it is perfect, and his word is always true. And I'm honored to be a part of its fulfillment here with you tonight.

These have been difficult months and years, a time worrying for Jewish Americans who love this country and the place that Jews have found in it. So we should also count ourselves blessed to be living at a moment when the secretary of state of the most powerful nation on earth felt free, and was inspired, to give a speech such as this. How striking it is to know that while most of the political leaders of Europe would refuse to celebrate the Israeli connection to the City of David, a biblically inspired American political leader recognized not only its spiritual sublimity, but also America's intellectual indebtedness to it. As we prepare to mark the 250th anniversary of the Founding, more debates about the meaning of America will unfold. We must make sure that this seminal address in Jerusalem is front and center in those debates so that it can serve as a beacon to all of us. 🏴☠️



The Commentary Magazine Podcast.

A DAILY REFLECTION ON THIS
UNPRECEDENTED TIME.

If you aren't
joining us
already,
we invite you
to listen.



Our podcasts post every day between 11 am and Noon eastern time.

Search for it on iTunes, Stitcher, or listen on our
website at commentary.org

THE COMMENTARY MAGAZINE PODCAST

Podcasting Through Two Years of Hell

A conversation between John Podhoretz and Dan Senior

JOHN PODHORETZ: Dan, you and I are in a unique position because for the last two years, our respective podcasts have become a key source of a complex blend of information, news, perspective, and comfort to people deeply affected by October 7 and the two-year war that followed. And one of the things that *Call Me Back* and *The Commentary Magazine Podcast* have in common is that this was entirely situational. We didn't plan it. We didn't think that this is what we were going to talk about for two years on the morning of October 6, 2023.

JOHN PODHORETZ is the editor of COMMENTARY. DAN SENIOR is the co-author of *The Genius of Israel and Start-Up Nation*. He is the host of the *Call Me Back* podcast and a member of COMMENTARY's Board of Trustees.

You had been doing this podcast about what America might be like after the coronavirus. Then, after a couple of months of podcasting about the aftermath of October 7, *Call Me Back* took off like few things I can think of taking off. It was like suddenly two months in, it was all I heard people talking about, you shot up the Apple charts. Why did you connect so viscerally with so many people?

DAN SENIOR: What I felt was missing from all the international press coverage and many of the conversations was Israelis speaking to the world from Israel trying to explain the dilemmas and the challenges they were dealing with as they were confronted with this war—Israelis who don't always agree with each other and don't always agree with certain parts of our audience. I had no idea there'd be a big market for it. I had no idea there'd be that much interest in it. It was who

Listeners were like, Oh, this could be my anchor. This could be the place I go to just make sure I'm not losing my mind. We were providing that content to people who needed it.

I wanted to hear from. And in hearing these Israelis wrestle with these challenges and talk about these challenges, they also explained basic facts and basic history when the conversation and the press coverage turned so dark over here and was so unnerving to so many of us in the Jewish community. I mean, it's crazy. There's your podcast, there's my podcast; we can probably count on one hand how many others that actually just provided basic facts, basic history. Listeners were like, *Oh, this could be my anchor. This could be the place I go to just make sure I'm not losing my mind. No, Israel's not actually trying to impose a mass famine on the Palestinian people. No, Israel's not targeting hospitals in order to kill babies in incubators.* We were providing that content to people who needed it. One thing I did, and you sometimes give me a hard time about, is I included in the conversations people who are considerably to the left of me. And I know that made some of our listeners crazy, but I just thought it was important to keep everybody in the room, you know. I've heard from many people over here in this community, in the Diaspora community, including someone who's a close friend of yours and mine, say to me, "You know, your podcast is holding the whole community together. Like, otherwise it's gonna split apart." Now, I don't think our podcast was single-handedly doing that, but in a sense, it's a metaphor.

JOHN: There's also a question of family.

DAN: I think we talk about how October 7 and the war that followed touched every single Israeli. As Tal Becker said on my podcast, Israel is a very small country, but it's a really big family. As a percentage of the population, more Israelis served in this war than Americans fought in World War II. And those family connections are broader than that. We have that, right? You have a nephew and a nephew-in-law serving. I have sisters who are living through this and whose daughters and sons have all served in some way, been called up for reserve duty, have spouses and boyfriends who've all been called up, one of whom is literally right now in Gaza waiting for when he gets pulled back but hasn't been pulled out yet. What's the secret sauce? I think part of it is that we have this very intuitive, instinctive sense for what's going on. Because we're talking to family members who are in it every single day.

JOHN: Our audiences are not parallel, I think, though it's likely that they overlap very, very substantially. My audience probably has a larger contingent of non-Jews in it than yours. When you say I gave you a hard time about having people on that I don't agree with ideologically, some of that is jokey. Because I think there was a real lesson in what you've been doing. Israelis, all Israelis, understood down to their kishkas that the attack of October 7 was an attack on all of them. It was designed to lead to a multifront attack, to bring Hezbollah down from the north to create a two-front war, maybe ignite the West Bank to create a third front. All so Israel would be pincered on all sides. There was no safe harbor. So you're having on people of different ideological colorations, including somebody like Benny Morris, who is reviled in many quarters for having stained Israel's reputation in the world as a historian by focusing on supposed atrocities that Israel committed in the War of Independence. Benny Morris was no different from anybody else in Israel in saying, "Yes, this is an existential threat to us, and this is a war that we have to win, and we have no choice." It was very meaningful that he said that to you, just as it was meaningful on your podcast that you surfaced people who are very much on the left in the United States. I think particularly of Sam Harris and Scott Galloway, who emerged as defenders of Israel and the Zionist project and whatever out of nowhere. But they saw what they saw with their eyes, and they could not stay silent, and that had great meaning to people. So what you and we were saying seemed to be not only helpful to people but drew this audience because their friends were saying, "You've got to listen to *Call Me Back* or COMMENTARY because everybody is talking nonsense or worse or is being deliberately dishonest, and you can get a better flavor of the situation." From us. People needed to hear voices saying, "No, you're not crazy. What's happening to Israel is evil and it's barbaric."

DAN: You mentioned Sam Harris and Scott Galloway and people like that. I think that was in part the wake-up call because Sam Harris is an elite podcaster. And Scott Galloway is affiliated with a university. He's affiliated with NYU. So he was watching what was happening at NYU and he was like, wait a minute. Harris was watching people he knew and listened to, what

I think what October 7 did for non-Jewish elites is it at least got them thinking about how complicated this was and that the mainstream media was missing the complexity.

they were saying, and he was shocked by it. I do think there are a lot of liberal Jews, even Jews who would self-describe as progressive, who were drawn to my podcast because of people like that, because of Sam Harris and Scott Galloway. I had Sam Harris on again on my podcast for the two-year anniversary of October 7, and he'd come on my podcast for a long conversation for the one-year anniversary of October 7. I'd asked him on the first anniversary, I said, "What has surprised you most over the past year?" And he said, "This explosion of anti-Semitism. I thought we'd lived through, like, an enlightened era and I was so floored by it." So then we did a conversation for the two-year anniversary. And I said, "After the first year, you told me your biggest surprise was the explosion of anti-Semitism. Now, tell me your biggest surprise in the second year." And he said, "It's just still the explosion of anti-Semitism. I'm still shocked by it. Like, two years in, I'm still shocked by it."

JOHN: What I'm floored by is hearing Harry Enten on CNN telling me that in the immediate aftermath of October 7, America supported Israel over the Palestinians by 49 points. Two years in, and America supports Palestinians over Israel by 1 point. That's a 48-point swing. That says to me that these two years have featured an unbelievably successful propaganda campaign against Israel, against Zionism, against the idea that what was going on was a response to unprecedented assault and that Israel had the right to defend itself. That's frightening and dangerous.

DAN: I'd say less than a quarter of our audience is not Jewish. But when we drill down and understand where that audience is, the non-Jewish audience, it's basically in two corners. One is a lot of journalists who aren't Jewish, who quietly, secretly listen to *Call Me Back*. I don't want to out people here, but there are journalists who are at CNN and the *Atlantic* and the *New York Times*. So I have found that even in the non-Jewish world, among elite types, there are some people who don't wake up as cheerleaders for Israel every day, but they also don't wake up every day with this hostility to Israel. I think what October 7 did for them is it at least got them thinking about how complicated this was and that the mainstream media was missing the

complexity. And they felt a sense of responsibility, to their credit, to at least try to address the complexity, even if they wouldn't wind up on every issue where you would or I would wind up. At least they knew, it's more complicated than it's being reported.

JOHN: Something happened to you in London with a listener.

DAN: I was in London in December 2023, and I was invited to meet with the Saudi ambassador to the UK. It turned out he was a regular listener to the podcast. And he wanted to talk about what was going on in Israel. At some point I said to him, "You know, Mr. Ambassador, I'm flattered, but why? Why are you listening to my podcast?" And he said, "You know, as a diplomat for Saudi Arabia, I get official transcripts of statements by the prime minister at the beginning of cabinet meetings or press statements. But I don't really understand how actual Israelis are thinking about things. And your podcast is delivering that for me." After that, I said to my colleague Ilan, "Can you see geographically where our listeners are?" And sure enough, we have a big audience in the Arab world. Had no idea. I mean, not big relative to our audience in the U.S. or Canada or the UK, but it was much bigger than I expected. And I assume these are all elites. It's not like the guy on the street is listening to us. These are all professors, I'm sure, like at Cairo University or the diplomats at the Saudi foreign ministry. They're elite types, but still. And I just thought to myself, podcasts like yours and mine, if we can reach people like that, there's got to be something more here we can do now that we're out of this. There's got to be a way to start reaching these people in a systematic way because they admit that they can't get this from the mainstream media.

JOHN: These are positive signs, but they come amidst frightening portents in American politics.

DAN: I don't know if you saw this clip floating around, Kamala Harris giving an interview in which she was asked about whether Israel had committed a genocide, and she didn't knock it down. She didn't endorse it, but she basically gave oxygen to it. Like she legitimized it as a question.

I see something almost providential in what has happened here. This is the only issue on which Trump appears to come at matters in a moral and intellectual frame.

JOHN: You can add to that, in terms of the mainstream Democratic Party that was in power until January, that Biden's national-security adviser, Jake Sullivan, says he now supports an arms embargo against Israel. He's also now the spouse of a first-term congressman from New Hampshire. And I think he said what he said about an arms embargo for her sake. If his idea is that a member of Congress from New Hampshire, even in a liberal part of New Hampshire, needs her husband to say that he would support an arms embargo so that that can't be used against her by a democratic socialist in a primary, that's a ...

DAN: To quote Abe Greenwald, it's worse than that. It's worse than that. I spoke to one of Sullivan's former colleagues. And I said, "What was that about?" And this individual said, "Jake doesn't believe that. It was only months ago that we were dealing repeatedly with these very issues, and it was constantly being proposed to us from various people within the administration and Congress that we consider doing this, and he was always against it. He wasn't just against it. He was one of the people who was just constantly shutting it down. So I know he doesn't support this." So I said, "What is it then? Why the change?" He said, "Because Jake wants to maintain his viability to serve in a future Democratic administration. That's what it is; that he needs to cleanse himself of the Biden foreign policy." He was basically saying that no matter who is the next Democratic president, the price of entry is, at a minimum, supporting this position. That's all you need to know. Sullivan is a young guy, like 45, he's ambitious, he's talented, he wants to serve in future administrations, and he could. He just needs to get this thing cleaned up, this whole pro-Israel thing.

JOHN: I think we have to talk a little about the surprise of the second administration of Donald Trump. You and I, I wouldn't say famously, but at least publicly were, you know, anti-Trump in 2016. And I think we were pleasantly surprised in the first term by many actions taken by the Trump administration. But I was not prepared for the resolute quality of the nine months leading up to the astonishing events of September and October. I see something almost providential in what has happened here. This is the only issue on which

Trump appears to come at matters in a moral and intellectual frame. On the floor of the Knesset, as the hostages were coming home, he stood there and said he believed that Israel not only won the war but was just and righteous. And his 20-point plan is basically Israel's long-held wish list for peace with the Palestinians. The Palestinians have to disarm, they have to create a sort of a democratic polity. They need to change their education system. They need to change their media. They need to change their this, that, and the other thing. And then, at the end of that, and with various confidence-building measures, at that point, that's when we can talk about a Palestinian state.

Speaking as a Zionist, as somebody with family in Israel, as somebody who believes in the Jewish state as an intellectual and historical project and believes that it is the fulfillment of my own faith's deepest longing, yearning, and need, my personal feeling of gratitude to Donald Trump has kind of overwhelmed me in the last two weeks. There was a time it was the last thing I would ever have expected to feel; I expected I could feel grudging support for some policies that I thought were okay from somebody that I did not, you know, have the highest opinion of, but that was it. And here I am now.

DAN: I feel the same way. I will say I'm struck by how many Diaspora Jews I know who feel that way. I mean a lot, meaning it's more than I expected. They're not being clinical about it. They're not being, *Well, yeah, I guess this is good. I guess he deserves some credit, Trump.* You know, they're feeling a version of what you just expressed. I don't know where people go with that, but I'm just hearing that over and over and over. I met with Trump in December of '24 during the transition, at Mar-a-Lago. At one point, we're talking about Israel on October 7. And he started to describe in excruciating, in very graphic detail, the images of October 7 of the hostages basically being taken. I don't want to go through all of them now, but you know, just some of the more grotesque and ghoulish images. And I'm sitting there thinking, why is he sitting there going through all of these again? It can't just be for my benefit and the people I was with because he knows we know this as well. He was almost describing it as though we didn't see the images, and he was going to tell us how awful they were. So I do think he was affected by October 7. And

President Donald Trump is now at the top of a list, at least at our moment, a list of righteous Gentiles who have affected Jewish history for the better.

I do think he was affected by the hostages and their families. I don't know to what extent he's affected by anything. I don't know him well, certainly. But people I do know who know him well say he doesn't usually talk in emotional terms about much of anything except this issue. So something about this touched him and moved him in a way that he can't stop talking about it—even when he knows the people he's talking to about it know. And yet, he still feels he needs to talk about it.

JOHN: I remember that in 2015 and 2016, one of the reasons that I was feeling negatively about him was that the tone that he took when he talked about the Middle East was very much different. It was him saying he could make the greatest real estate deal. But for me, this is a moral and civilizational struggle that Israel has been going through for more than seven decades, facing an eliminationist philosophy that it can't really negotiate with. It sounded like Trump was coming at this from his transactional side: Everybody's got their case and you sit down at a table and everybody can work it out. That sounded like the basis of something very bad. But something else happened, especially this year. During the High Holy Days, we read in synagogue from the Book of Numbers, the story of the Gentile prophet Balaam who was hired by an enemy of the Jews. Balaam is a real prophet with magical powers, so his curses can really have a devastating effect. So God puts words of praise rather than curse in Balaam's mouth. I'm certainly not saying that Trump is an evil prophet and God had to put words in his mouth. But there is this tradition in Jewish history at very, very, very odd moments,

when righteous Gentiles arise to help us, like Cyrus, the king of Persia, who lets the Jews return to Israel after their forcible exile. Donald Trump is now at the top of a list, at least at our moment, a list of righteous Gentiles who have affected Jewish history for the better.

DAN: Like you, I'm overwhelmed by it. I feel like we're going to be processing this for a while. What has just happened. Because it's not like there's what Trump would have done, and then there's what Trump did, and then the alternative would have been maybe not as good, but good enough. You know, or fine, or a little annoying, but fine. It's the contrast to Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. It wasn't just that Trump did what he did. It's that the other side has gone, you know, is going in this incredibly dark direction.

JOHN: I don't know where things go from here. Optimism, you know, could be a fool's errand.

DAN: That's how I feel. On the one hand, I have extraordinary optimism, and I can paint a picture of how Israel is now in for a roaring few years of successes. And I feel that way economically, I feel that way militarily, I feel that way geopolitically, I feel that way even societally about Israel. And I could paint that picture and I tend to believe it, but I also know how shocked I was by October 7. And you know, and just when you're feeling overly confident and rosy-eyed is when something sneaks up on you. So I'm, I'm, waiting.

JOHN: Well, that's Jewish history for you. 🦋

The New Middle East and the Challenges to Israel

The war may be over. The fighting is not

By Jonathan Schanzer

“Behold, the Guardian of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” PSALM 121:4

THE LAST LIVE hostages are out of Gaza. Hamas is battered and bloodied. Indeed, all of Israel’s regional foes are worse off than they were two years ago. President Donald Trump has declared the Middle East to be at peace. But the guardians of Israel know that’s not true. There is still some fighting left, both out in the open and in the shadows. It is important now for Israel to lock in the gains from these grueling two years of war.

JONATHAN SCHANZER is executive director of Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a contributing editor to COMMENTARY.

There has never been a war quite like the one Israel has just fought (and may still be fighting). The war played out on seven kinetic fronts—eight if you count Israel’s September 9 strike on Qatar—with additional battles in cyberspace, the mainstream media, social media, college campuses, courtrooms, the United Nations, and beyond. Growing political isolation was among the most painful aspects of this war for Israel’s traumatized 10 million residents. The world’s only Jewish state was singled out as the Jew of nations. The hate spewed forth, even as the Israelis fought for their lives against the Islamic Republic of Iran and its well-armed proxies.

Israel stood unwavering in the face of withering assaults, one more punishing than the next. And with help from the American president, it emerged from the

fighting bruised but intact. Its admittedly polarizing prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was under constant attack within and without—but never lost sight of Israel’s strategic goals and, whether all its citizens liked it or not, steered the country to the advantageous position where it is now perched.

Israel is back where it began on October 6, 2023. It’s a politically divided nation that must begin to grapple again with core issues that were obscured by the war and must still be wrestled to the ground. The controversy over judicial matters, stemming from the country’s lack of a constitution, will once again flare up. The question of Orthodox conscription will, too. There will be some who wish to avoid these debates, for fear that Israel is too tired or too divided to tackle them. But they are inevitable, and if they can come to some resolution, that will only make Israel stronger.

The raucous domestic politics of Israel will return, not that they were ever really suspended. Netanyahu will be at the center of the noise. During his address to the Knesset on October 13, Donald Trump appealed directly to the Israeli president and the Israeli people to drop the legal cases pending against him. That is not likely to occur. But what is likely: The longest-serving prime minister in Israel’s history and the most successful democratic politician of the 21st century anywhere in the world will run for another political term. There are no limits preventing him from doing so. But even his supporters are weary of what seems like one-man rule. An Israeli soldier I spoke with this year told me she has known only one leader in her entire life, save 2022 (the one year since 2009 during which Israel had a different premier). Even so, King Bibi may be crowned again in the forthcoming elections, primarily because the field of challengers appears shallow.

Netanyahu will be dealing with an economy in need of rebuilding. The Israelis reportedly spent a whopping 300 billion shekels on this war. That’s about \$90 billion in military mobilization and munitions and benefits to the families of the fallen and injured, and payments to reservists for their time. The country is not likely to experience the stagflation that marked the period after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The return of soldiers to their tech start-ups, not to mention the return of tourists to the country, will soon help resuscitate the economy (if the cease-fire holds). But the fiscal challenges must not be minimized, primarily because Israel is now already in the process of rebuilding its stockpiles and capabilities in preparation for the next

war. Renewed conflict is all but guaranteed, though the enemy is uncertain and the time unknowable.

What is not guaranteed is Israel’s supply chain for weapons. The Biden administration gave us a glimpse of a dangerous future for Israel when it withheld weapons from the Jewish state in 2024, bending to the information onslaught that isolated Israel. This weakened Israel’s hand on the battlefield. European

Israel will need to rethink its longstanding reliance on others for the guns and bombs that have long enabled its military dominance.

nations, led by the obstreperous Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, began to engage in similar virtue-signaling in the months leading up to the Trump cease-fire. All of this means that Israel will need to rethink its long-standing reliance on others for the guns and bombs that have long enabled its military dominance. But thinking about how to do that is one thing. Acting on it is quite another. Building a domestic defense-industrial base is complicated, costly, and certainly won’t happen overnight. The good news for Israel is that plans for long-term self-reliance are already in the works.

However, armaments are not the only thing being denied to Israel from the international community. In sports, academia, entertainment, and beyond, Israelis continue to be shunned and excluded. Israel’s legitimacy will likely remain under assault. The stated reason for this over the past two years was purported Israeli war crimes in Gaza. But by now it should be clear that this is a well-financed and orchestrated campaign in which Israel remains the constant target, but the ostensible grounds for the attacks are infinitely malleable.

The list of campaigns to isolate Israel is long and littered with failures. These include, but are not limited to, the Arab boycott of Israel at its founding; the oil embargo after the 1973 Yom Kippur War; the support in the West for the first and second intifadas; the Durban Conference in 2001; and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement modeled on the campaign that brought down the apartheid regime in South Africa. Despite Israel’s pitiful efforts at public relations, the country has battled back and won.

That said, Israel has never quite been under assault the way it is now, with the Jewish people worldwide in the crosshairs as well. New solutions are needed, and they are not hard to grasp. Just as this assault

has been driven by technology, Israel will need to respond in kind. This will require the use of emerging technologies, like artificial intelligence, to alter the informational battlefield to Israel's advantage. As it happens, Israel stands at the forefront of this space. Opportunities abound.

BUT THE MOST significant opportunities awaiting Israel are of the diplomatic variety. The widening of the Abraham Accords beckons. This is certainly the goal of the American president, whose second term has taken a surprising turn. He has his eye on a Nobel Peace Prize. And, as it turns out, the war that Israel has just fought affords Donald Trump a new path to glory that did not exist even during his first term, when he brokered the historic Abraham Accords with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco. Today, there exist possibilities of normalization with Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia, among others.

Normalization with Lebanon is possible now because Hezbollah has been hammered beyond all recognition. The government in Beirut, dysfunctional as it is, has a once-in-a-generation chance to cement the primacy that it now enjoys thanks to Israel's punishing campaign against Hezbollah, during which the IDF decapitated the Iranian proxy's leaders and top fighters.

Normalization with Syria is also in view, thanks to the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime in December 2024. That was made possible by Israel's beat-down of the Syrian military and the Iranian militias that should have been working to buttress Assad but instead trifled with Israel once the October 7 war erupted. It was a fatal error. Once the Assad regime fell, only to be backfilled by an unstable regime run by a purportedly reformed jihadist, the new Syrian government quickly realized it was weak and vulnerable. The notion of continued war with Israel was under-

join the Abraham Accords back in 2020, only to lose the election. Team Biden then promptly erased all of Trump's progress by alienating the Saudi leadership over human rights concerns—only to come back to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, hat in hand, seeking energy guarantees after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Saudis demurred, but the prospects changed when Donald Trump returned to the White House. Still, MBS and the Saudis couldn't take an open step toward Israel until the Gaza war ended. Time will take care of that. If Trump's cease-fire holds, the Saudis could come to the table before the president's second term ends.

In the meantime, one interesting normalization agreement may be coming sooner than anyone expected. The world's most populous Muslim country is mulling a diplomatic pact. Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto rose before the United Nations on September 23 and declared that the Middle East would never achieve peace until Israel's security was vouchsafed. Unbelievably, he ended his speech with the word "Shalom." Then, less than a month later, on October 13, just as the hostages were being reunited with their families, Israeli news began to report that Subianto was on his way to Israel. Those reports were soon denied by Jakarta. It may have had something to do with his visit coinciding with the holiday of Simchat Torah, during which the Israelis could not have possibly hosted him. We'll see what Subianto's next moves might be.

ALL THESE DEALS are possible now. But the odds that they come to fruition hinge on whether the region can maintain the quiet that Donald Trump brokered. And that depends on the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies, as well as Turkey, Qatar, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The regime in Iran is undeniably angling for another tussle with Israel. The 12-day war in June was a bitter defeat, punctuated by the painful destruction of the Iranian nuclear program, thanks to Trump's remarkable surprise decision to participate. The regime is now working feverishly to reestablish its

The regime in Iran is working feverishly to reestablish its air defenses, rebuild its ballistic missile arsenal, and maybe even rebuild its nuclear program.

stood to be a liability. So President Ahmed al-Sharaa is now angling for a "security agreement" with Israel. Should that materialize, and should it be maintained, it's not unimaginable that the two countries could enter a wider diplomatic pact.

The Saudis are Trump's ultimate prize. The American president had Riyadh on the five-yard line to

air defenses, rebuild its ballistic missile arsenal, and perhaps even rebuild its nuclear program. Israeli war planners quietly speak now of a possible need to head back to Iran as early as next year, to keep its most powerful enemy from growing any more powerful.

There is also the rest of the Iranian axis. So long as the regime maintains its ambition of destroying

Israel, its proxies will do the same. This includes Hezbollah, Hamas, Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen. They continue to receive weapons, funding, and other support from the regime, albeit at far more modest levels. In other words, the “ring of fire” is not yet extinguished. This means that Israel must continue to attack them all, whether openly or in the shadows, to ensure that their strength does not return. This is the “Campaign Between the Wars” that Israel waged before October 7. It must continue to do so now, perhaps with even greater intensity.

And then there is the question of Turkey. The country with the second-largest army in NATO has openly called for the Islamic world to coalesce and destroy Israel. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a pugnacious figure with neo-Ottoman ambitions, may see an opportunity to fill a possible void left by the Iranian regime after its defeat this summer. The Erdogan regime’s key

ally is the wealthy microstate of Qatar, which cannot offer Turkey much help on the battlefield. But it can certainly help fund Turkish ambitions, while offering support through the networks of Islamist adherents to the Muslim Brotherhood movement that Doha has quietly cultivated over decades. Indeed, a new enemy front may be forming.

THE CHALLENGES and possibilities for Israel right now are enormous. Israel has an opportunity to wrestle with its domestic demons, secure the military wins it notched, and convert diplomatic possibilities into pacts. None of this would be feasible without the Gaza cease-fire, which was primarily the result of Israeli fortitude (and a fair amount of regional exhaustion). But this is no time for a breather. For Israel, after two years of a grueling war, a new kind of hard work begins. 📖➡️

The Assassination Fan Base

Once horrifying, the targeted murder of prominent people now comes with a built-in subculture and cheering section

By Tod Lindberg

ERAS CREEP IN and taper off without clear demarcation; only in retrospect can we classify a single event as the beginning of one or the end of another. With the two assassination attempts on Donald Trump as well as the successful hits on United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson and conservative activist Charlie Kirk, we must now ask whether a new era of assassinations is upon us, an era comparable to the one that gripped the country between 1963 and the early 1980s.

The assassination of JFK in November 1963 shocked America to its core. The America of 1963 did not need a “visual” to be shocked; it would be nearly 12 years before the public got a chance to see the “Za-

pruder film,” the grainy, black-and-white home movie of Kennedy’s last moments as his motorcade passed the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas and an assassin’s bullet tore through his skull. The mere notion that anyone might kill the president of the United States was itself borderline unthinkable—in a way, perhaps, even for those charged with the safety of the president. Riding in the back of a limo open to the air was as normal for presidents and politicians in its day as it has been unthinkable ever since.

That kind of weird innocence persisted in the immediate wake of the assassination. The authorities quickly located the assassin and arrested Lee Harvey Oswald. They could not imagine that the open way they disclosed plans about Oswald’s movements in custody would provide an opportunity to a man with a gun and murderous intent to get so close. Photographers were on hand to capture Jack Ruby firing a single shot at close range. The best-known image of

TOD LINDBERG *is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute.*

The JFK assassination's presence in our common cultural conversation didn't wane over time in part because political violence started to become commonplace in its wake.

Lee Harvey Oswald is the one in which he is already dying—a split second after being hit, a stunned expression on his face and his mouth slightly agape.

With a president and his assassin both dead, the conclusion of investigative commissions that Oswald was “a lone gunman acting alone” instantly had to vie with numerous other scenarios that emerged from elaborate chains of speculation. And does, to this day. We are used to writing off such speculation by invoking the term “conspiracy theory,” which is a way of dismissing those who challenge widely accepted accounts of the supposed facts of a situation. But throughout history, assassinations have more often than not been conspiracies. While some American killers—like “disappointed office seeker Charles Guiteau,” who shot President James Garfield because he didn't get a patronage job—did the job themselves, John Wilkes Booth was not “acting alone” when he assassinated Lincoln, just as Brutus was the leader of a conspiracy to murder Julius Caesar.

Only 49 years before JFK was killed, numerous conspiring individuals with bombs and guns had stationed themselves on Archduke Franz Ferdinand's path through Sarajevo in 1914 before Gavrilo Princip got him, setting World War I in train. Puerto Rican nationalists worked together to try and assassinate Harry Truman in 1950. Thus it was hardly irrational to inquire into the possibility of a conspiracy, especially since Oswald was a known Communist who had defected to the Soviet Union five years earlier before giving up and returning to the United States. Law enforcement always considers the possibility that more than one person is involved in a difficult-to-solve murder and sometimes finds a conspiracy at work. When the conclusion is otherwise, as it was with the Warren Commission's finding in the Oswald case, it's an easy leap for conspiracy-hunters to conclude that law enforcement must have been in on it.

The impact of the JFK assassination and its presence in our common cultural conversation did not wane over time, in part because assassinations and political violence started to become commonplace in its wake. It was the first in a series of high-profile murders or assassinations, or attempts thereof, that persisted for more than two decades.

The Kennedy assassination marked the turn as

well to a period of volatility in American politics in a bizarre conflation of the civil rights movement, campus protest, early feminism, a new intellectual radicalism, and the escalation of and mounting opposition to the war in Vietnam—as well as resistance to all these trends.

There had even been a prologue to the Kennedy assassination some months before in 1963: the assassination of civil rights activist Medgar Evers, the NAACP's field officer in Mississippi. Evidence pointed to a member of the Ku Klux Klan, who in 1964 was charged and brought to trial. All-white juries hung twice, letting him go free. (In a controversial retrial in 1994, a mixed-race jury convicted Byron De La Beckwith of the murder.)

After Kennedy, the next high-profile American assassination was that of the militant black nationalist Malcom X, in 1965. This was indeed the product of a conspiracy. Multiple gunmen opened fire on him as he was about to give a speech. In this case, however, the deed was a product of an internecine struggle, since the perpetrators were members of the Nation of Islam, from which Malcom X had grown increasingly estranged in recent years.

The impression of the 1960s as an assassination spree solidified with the slayings of civil rights giant Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 and, mere months later, President Kennedy's brother and former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, then himself a presidential candidate.

James Earl Ray, whose racist views were unconcealed, shot King with a high-powered rifle from a building across from King's Memphis motel room. King and his colleagues had stepped outside onto the walkway of their second-floor room. A photographer who was staying in a room nearby heard the shot and rushed onto the walkway, where he captured an image of the mortally wounded King collapsed on the floor as members of his retinue, arms outstretched, point in the direction from which the shot came.

Riots broke out across the country, wreaking devastation in urban areas. Ray, who fled the scene but was quickly identified as the prime suspect, was apprehended abroad, traveling on a counterfeit passport, in June 1968. He confessed and was sentenced to 99 years, though he later recanted and unpersuasively

As Sirhan saw it, RFK's support for Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967 and for sending Phantom fighter jets to the Jewish state in its aftermath warranted his murder.

alleged a conspiracy. In 1975, however, Americans learned that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI had been surveilling King as part of its COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) activities, which let loose a fresh torrent of conspiratorial speculation.

Bobby Kennedy was a senator from New York and, by June 1968, a leading candidate for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination. On June 4, he was in California celebrating his primary victories that day in California and South Dakota. As Kennedy and his entourage made their way out of the hotel through its kitchen shortly after midnight, Sirhan Sirhan, 24 years old, rushed RFK, shooting the senator three times, including once at close range in the head. Sirhan wounded several others before he was subdued. Photographers captured iconic images of a busboy kneeling next to the fallen RFK trying to comfort him. Kennedy died in a hospital 26 hours later.

Sirhan was a Palestinian Christian who had emigrated with his family from Jordan to the United States after Israel's War of Independence. He was blunt about his anti-Semitic motive. As Sirhan saw it, RFK's support for Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967 and for sending Phantom fighter jets to the Jewish state in its aftermath warranted his murder. Convicted at trial, he received a sentence of death, later commuted to life in prison. Though eligible for parole, he has been denied every time, most recently by Governor Gavin Newsom in 2023. He was also repeatedly denied motions for a new trial, alleging that he had been drugged or brainwashed as part of a conspiracy.

In May 1972, Alabama Governor George Wallace was on the presidential campaign trail in Laurel, Maryland. With television cameras rolling, Wallace took off his suit coat and began to work the crowd. Arthur Bremer, 21, stepped up and fired multiple times, gravely wounding Wallace, who survived but remained paralyzed from the waist down. The television footage, captured at close range, is graphic. Wallace falls to the blacktop on his back, and blood spreads on his white shirt. Bremer's diary, which *Harper's* published to substantial controversy as a self-portrait of a sociopath living in troubled times, claimed he had shot Wallace in pursuit of notoriety. Once again, conspiracy theories abounded, including one advanced by the left-wing literary provocateur Gore Vidal. He claimed the diary

had been a plant by the Nixon White House. The jury rejected Bremer's insanity defense, and he spent 35 years in prison.

Assassinations were only one part of the broader story of political violence in the United States and abroad in this period. U.S. troop deployment in Vietnam peaked at more than 530,000 in 1968, and protests began to accelerate. During the Democratic National Convention in 1968, the streets and parks of Chicago saw violent clashes between police and thousands of demonstrators protesting the war. The revolutionary Black Panther Party, which espoused a doctrine of armed resistance, was involved in shoot-outs with police in Oakland, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. Members were also charged with plotting to plant bombs in public buildings. To "bring the war home," the Weather Underground, a revolutionary spin-off of the left-wing Students for a Democratic Society, launched a bombing campaign targeting police stations and government buildings, including the Pentagon and the Capitol. Police who found themselves the target of rocks generally broke up protests with tear gas, but in the case of Kent State University in 1970, members of the National Guard opened fire on student protesters, killing four.

Nor was the United States alone in political violence. At the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, the Palestinian group Black September took Israeli athletes hostage and killed 11 with the world watching. "Bloody Friday" in Northern Ireland involved more than 20 separate bombings orchestrated in Belfast by the Irish Republican Army in little more than an hour. Prime ministers of Jordan and Spain were among the more prominent victims of assassins in 1971 and 1973, respectively. The first president of Bangladesh was slain alongside most of his family in a coup in 1975.

Meanwhile, in the course of less than three weeks in September 1975, there were two attempts on the life of President Gerald R. Ford. The first was by a follower of the notorious cult leader and convicted murderer Charles Manson. Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme pointed a gun at Ford but didn't fire it. She said she wanted to draw attention to environmental causes. The second would-be assassin, Sara Jane Moore, who later said she sought to spark a violent revolution, got a shot off but missed. A man nearby grabbed her arm as she fired

The sense that America had been spinning out of control helped put Ronald Reagan in the White House by a staggering margin of 10 points and 40 states in 1980.

a second time, deflecting the shot, which wounded a bystander. Film crews captured both attempts, and the first impression the footage leaves, when viewed 50 years later, is of a sudden outburst of confusing motion. If one didn't know what one was seeing, one wouldn't. Fromme and Moore each received life sentences and won parole after serving more than 30 years. (Moore died in September at the age of 95.)

In the mid-to-late 1970s, the Red Army Faction in Germany murdered 34 politicians and industrialists, while the Red Brigades in Italy kidnapped and slaughtered leading Italian politician Aldo Moro. In the United States, following the resignation of President Nixon, the brief Ford administration, and the 1976 election of Jimmy Carter, American history journeyed through a truly dismal period, one that prominently featured the assassination of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone by political rival Dan White in 1978. Moscone had won the election only with the support of a radical minister named Jim Jones, who later fled to Guyana along with nearly 1,000 members of his People's Temple. When Representative Leo Ryan went to the Jones compound to make sure his constituents weren't being held captive, he was murdered on Jones's orders. Jones then coerced his flock into consuming a poisoned fruit drink—a mass murder-suicide that took more than 900 lives.

The sense that America had been spinning out of control helped put Ronald Reagan in the White House by a staggering margin of 10 points and 40 states in 1980. Though a victory of such magnitude indicated an electorate deeply fatigued by the period's malaise, there would be no instantaneous exit. Barely three months after Reagan took office, John W. Hinckley shot Reagan as he was leaving an event at the Washington Hilton. Network news cameras captured the shooting, and the footage aired within minutes. Reagan recovered, but his injuries were far more grave than initially reported. A jury found Hinckley not guilty by reason of insanity (he had committed the crime to attract the attention of the teenage actress Jodie Foster), and he was institutionalized at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington and released in 2016. Federal law at the time of the shooting required the government to prove the defendant was *compos mentis* rather than requiring the defendant to prove he wasn't. After the Hinckley verdict, lawmakers reversed the burden.

Less than two months later, Mehmet Ali Agca shot and critically wounded Pope John Paul II in Vatican City's St. Peter's Square. Video captured John Paul II collapsing in the open-air Popemobile as it sped off. Agca, a Turkish national, had previously been imprisoned for the 1979 murder of a Turkish newspaper editor. He then escaped. Agca told multiple conflicting stories about the motive behind the assassination attempt. Italian authorities quickly determined that Agca did not act alone. His lengthy stay in a luxury hotel in Sofia established a "Bulgarian connection" that pointed back through Bulgarian intelligence and perhaps the East German Stasi to the KGB—and thus to the highest levels of the Soviet Union. The danger the Polish pope posed to the Soviet bloc was undeniable, but Soviet apologists denied any such connection, of course, and the evidence was pooh-poohed or simply ignored by many on the grounds that it would aggravate U.S. relations with Moscow. The Pope, for his part, forgave Agca, met him in prison, and urged his release.

One more stop abroad will suffice in this account: In 1984, the Irish Republican Army set off a massive bomb targeting UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in her hotel at a Tory party gathering in Brighton. It killed five people, and Thatcher herself was a narrow miss. Images of the hotel in the aftermath of the blast show a ragged V-shaped crater in the upper floors of the hotel and just to the left of the center of the façade. Patrick Magee, the IRA bomber, had planted the bomb and its timer during a stay at the hotel four weeks before. In this case, neither the perpetrators nor their motive was in doubt: The IRA issued a statement claiming responsibility and promising to try again. Police arrested Magee and other IRA members in London in 1985.

AND THEN THE assassination era came to an end, after two decades in which it was one of the dominating facts of our common life. Of course, political violence didn't end altogether, nor will it ever. Consider the anti-government bombing of the federal Murrah Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, which claimed 168 lives and injured hundreds more. Horrific it was, but thankfully, it proved to be a one-off. (The 9/11 attack six years later belongs in a separate category.)

The efforts to deny the leftward orientation of the political motivation in the assassination of Charlie Kirk would be laughable were they not a symptom of our current era.

The new source of recurring violent shock to the American psyche was the mass shooting, especially school shootings, which are distinctive not for high-profile victims but for the random ordinariness of the *mise-en-scène*. The Columbine High School shooting in Colorado in 1999 brought the matter home to the suburbs, where it remains. Anti-Semitic violence is a more recent recurring disruption.

Now, however, we are at least several attempts, some of them successful, into what may be a new era of assassinations. The dramatic near miss against Trump at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, in July 2024 was Exhibit A. Next was a second, fortunately bullet-free, attempt on Trump at his golf course in Florida. Third was the slaying of UnitedHealthcare's Thompson in midtown Manhattan in December 2024. Finally, and most dramatically, was the assassination of Charlie Kirk at a college campus event in Utah in September. Other noteworthy recent entries include the slaying of the Minnesota state house's Democratic majority leader in June 2025, an aborted attempt on Justice Brett Kavanaugh in June 2022, and an arson attack in April 2025 on the governor's mansion in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, intended to kill the state's governor, Josh Shapiro, as he and his family slept. At a further remove, mass shootings took place at a GOP congressional baseball practice in 2017 and at a constituent meeting in Arizona with Democratic Representative Gabby Giffords in 2011. Though some were wounded in these events, the lawmakers survived.

If a new era of assassinations is underway, it has not supplanted but rather overtaken the era of mass shootings. These have continued, with churches and Jews increasingly prominent among the targets.

But why assassinations then? And why now?

The potential victims of assassins haven't changed. They are prominent individuals whom assassins have targeted specifically. (Political violence in the form of terrorism typically doesn't have a particular individual as a target; its design is to terrify large populations.) Among the would-be assassins themselves, certain commonalities also emerge: a desire for notoriety, to leave an otherwise unattainable mark on history, and to pursue a political agenda.

On the latter, it's worth noting that animus among the killer or killers toward the victim is about

as close to an inescapable feature of assassination attempts as one gets. This is true of necessity in the case of a conspiracy. "Loners seeking notoriety" don't work for groups operating secretly. But it must hold true for the loners as well. The prominence of the victim has specific qualities, and the murder, or attempt, can't be separated from animus related to what has made the intended victim famous. Supposedly, John Hinckley was willing to try to kill Jimmy Carter, but he actually did try to kill Reagan. Bremer said he would kill Wallace or Nixon—but not George McGovern or Hubert Humphrey, the top two Democrats in the race for their party's nomination. The efforts to deny the leftward orientation of the political motivation in the assassination of Charlie Kirk would be laughable were they not a symptom of our current era. In general, it's hard to find a would-be assassin who professed undying love and support for the individual he was attempting to kill. The will to annihilate is specific—the target is not a president but *this* one.

If assassins are trying to change the course of history, which of course many are, they are attempting to do so by eliminating an obstacle that stands in the way of their vision, whatever it may be. The living JFK was an obstacle Oswald could and did overcome, leaving an indelible stamp. But how did history change? In ways we can never really know, and certainly not in ways that could be known in advance by an assassin. What if Lincoln or Kennedy had lived? The question invites those reflecting on it to project onto the past their current-day political preferences for how history might have been different. The deed may have been undertaken in pursuit of sweeping change, but in most cases, we are left with only the deed itself and the consequences that flow from it directly: better presidential security after JFK, the extension of Secret Service protection to presidential candidates after RFK, a national holiday and memorial on the National Mall for MLK. But would the Vietnam War or race relations have turned out differently? No one can know. The melodramatic assertion that the assassination of Franz Ferdinand *caused* World War I doesn't survive the reality of a chain of decisions that could have gone differently after the assassination.

That political violence in the form of assassination has political motives, and that they are often

In the late-20th-century era of assassination, Americans had at their disposal a social resource that went largely unappreciated at the time—the ability to ignore.

wildly out of sync with what the assassination will achieve, are constants not just in the recent American experience but throughout history. The big difference between the late-20th-century era of assassinations and the present is that the former was largely a story of the targets and the perpetrators (whether an individual or a conspiracy). Now, however, the story is about the targets on one side—and the perpetrators (alone or in conspiracy) *and the supporters of the perpetrators* on the other.

Consider the JFK assassination. This is high history, an individual inserting himself indelibly into the nation's story via the act of assassinating the president. The nation is an onlooker (which is the reason I made so much, in my brief catalogue of the previous period, of the visuals we have from these assassinations and attempts). We, the people, were not involved. We absorbed the information about events, and we responded accordingly, typically and normally with distress and outrage. Now, we mustn't be naive. There were, no doubt, Americans whose black hearts welcomed the death of one or both Kennedys, and that's likely all the truer in the case of King. But if so, they mostly kept it to themselves or articulated it only in the presence of intimates. You could say that the public square, notwithstanding the First Amendment and broader commitments to free speech, placed a cordon sanitaire around permissible opinion, keeping out such noxiousness as assassination celebration and consigning it to a fringe communicating through the mails with mimeograph sheets, and to private homes. A public culture of good manners also has the effect of cultivating well-mannered people and perhaps as well a moral sensibility of actual decency.

In the previous era of assassinations, Americans also had at their disposal a social resource that went largely unappreciated at the time—the ability to ignore. If you were the craziest person out of a million Americans in the 1980s, when there were 250 million Americans, you were pretty socially isolated from the 250 or so people who were just as crazy as you. Or make it the craziest in 100,000: isolated from your 2,500 peers nationwide. The latter might have proved sufficient for a gathering in a windowless big-city room. But that's not quite enough to make a revolution.

Now, through social media of all kinds, the 2,500

worst among us can easily find and interact with each other on a regular basis, exchanging views on whom to hate and perhaps who constitutes the gravest peril to the life they want to live. But now this is not a matter of just a single set of 1-in-100,000 sociopaths, nor is it obvious that sociopathy becomes dangerous only as it affects the 1-in-100,000 worst. Perhaps 8 million to 10 million people in America have been or are incarcerated for violent crimes. Out of 260 million adults, that's at least 1 in 50. Meanwhile, there are multiple overlapping and non-overlapping sets of sociopathic individuals based on the particulars of the sociopathy. In addition, the term "sociopath" may not describe a fixed quality, in the sense that one either is or is not sociopathic—or evil. Someone on the fence can be cultivated by a sociopath to turn sociopathic. One can even imagine an individual who has no intention of personally killing a member of some specified "out group" nevertheless encouraging someone else to kill through the mere addition of a "like" click on social media. In the context of terrorism, this process is generally known as "radicalization." In the context of American polarization and the ways in which we increasingly dehumanize those with whom we disagree, we might call this "sociopathization." I think, given recent examples, these processes do produce would-be assassins, including successful ones. But I also think they have produced something of significantly broader importance—in fact, the defining characteristic of the new era.

It's the assassination fan base.

The wounded Reagan quipped to the lead doctor on his trauma team, "I hope you're all Republican." What made the quip amusing is that both Reagan and the team knew it mattered not in the least whether its members were Republican. The doctor, a Democrat, amusingly but perhaps a bit solemnly replied, "Today, we're all Republicans."

I think most Americans would like to live in a world where such an exchange is still possible. I'm not sure it is.

A significant number of Americans took to Bluesky, TikTok, Reddit, and the streets to express their regret that Trump's would-be assassins had been unsuccessful and to praise the assassins of Charlie Kirk and UnitedHealthcare's Thompson. In the case of the latter two, many asked or offered their opinion on who

We are now living in a political culture in which a would-be assassin can count on a social network for inspiration and an outpouring of public support after the fact.

should be next. (I won't cite any examples. If you are at all online, you have seen them in abundance, and if not, you may want to spare yourself.)

At present, the assassination fan base is pretty much a left-wing subculture. So far, it has applauded attempts on the lives of a former president, a conservative activist, a corporate CEO, and a conservative Supreme Court justice. The closest thing on the right is the online coterie claiming that Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021, did nothing wrong, either because they were let in or were duped into entering by a government plot. But to speak up on behalf of J6 defendants, even to the point of alleging conspiracies, is not the same as celebrating the assassinations of Kirk and Thompson and lamenting

the misses on Trump. I hope no comparable figure on the left becomes a target that thereby allows us to ascertain whether there is a comparable fan base for assassination on the right.

We should also note that even "lone gunmen, acting alone" have to get their ideas about whom to target from somewhere. They, too, have social networks, which likely traffic in in-group suggestions about who in the out-group are the worst of the worst. So we are now living in a political culture in which a potential would-be assassin can count on a social network for inspiration and an outpouring of public support after the fact. This is fertile ground for evil, perhaps because assassins always believe they are doing good. And we may be cultivating more and more of them. 📌

The Murder of Charlie Kirk and the Threat to True Conservatism

The left has been exposed, but the right is in danger of following its destructive example

By Mike Burke

ON A SEPTEMBER day in Utah, Charlie Kirk stood before an audience of students and supporters at Utah Valley University. By all accounts, he was doing what he had done countless times before—speaking with the urgency

of a man whose vocation was persuasion. Then, in a single instant, the ordinary rhythm of a campus event gave way to chaos. A crack rang out; Kirk collapsed, struck in the neck. Witnesses screamed, fled, tried in vain to help. Hours later, the news confirmed what many had already feared: Charlie Kirk, husband and father, was dead. He was 31 years old.

In that moment, a movement defined by words faced its most terrible question: When speech is met with blood, can persuasion endure, or must fury give

MIKE BURKE is a British historian who works as a lecturer at Meiji University in Japan.

way to rage, radicalism, and resentment?

It was a moment that should never have happened; and yet, in the poisoned air of our age, we had all been waiting for it. Not to Kirk in particular—his death was a shock, sudden and cruel—but the act itself. The public killing of a man for what he believed was something any conservative could have foreseen, just as surely as many on the left would find a way to blame the right. Beneath the noise of politics, something older had been stirring—a moral hunger twisted to evil but disguised as virtue, waiting for permission to feed.

For years the hungry ghost of politics had been stirring beneath the surface—feeding on grievance, fattening on vanity—as it has always done before an age of ruin. Before the gulags, there were the denunciations; before the killing fields, the reeducation campaigns; before the Red Guards, the struggle sessions. The ritual is always the same: Speech is punished, doubt condemned, and posturing turned into a weapon. Out of that ritual rises something more dangerous still—a formless, amorphous rage that mistakes destruction for renewal, cruelty for courage, and outrage for truth.

Its power lies in its vagueness. It condemns not deeds but categories so vast that they seem to mean nothing at all, yet they are so elastic they can implicate nearly everyone. The Soviet Union called its enemies bourgeois; the Maoists called them counterrevolutionaries; the Khmer Rouge called them intellectuals. In our day, the press and its allies have renamed them “whiteness,” “the patriarchy,” and “the system.” The language changes, but the appetite does not. Its outline was visible in the thrill of denunciation, in the easy cruelty dressed as care—but those same voices pretended it was not there. They called this hunger

the 2010s. It was the teacher marched off campus while students cheered his downfall, condemned not for a crime but for a phrase torn from context. It was the student who raised a question and was met not with argument but accusation, who learned that silence was the only safe opinion. It was the novelist watching her career collapse in real time, denounced by thousands who never opened her book, while publishers scrambled to erase her name. These were not distant horrors. They were small, ordinary crucifixions—and they marked the hungry ghost feeding on American life.

The same instincts that exiled teachers and ruined novelists soon found a larger stage. The dominant culture turned private intolerance into public ritual, magnifying grievance, manufacturing guilt, and calling the contagion justice. What had begun as cultural fashion hardened into civic faith, and the fever that once ruled campuses and screens was about to consume the nation itself.

When George Floyd died in Minneapolis in June 2020, the dominating culture rushed not to caution but to condemnation. Within hours, a single death was transformed into cosmic indictment. The presumed guilt of one man became proof of a nation’s original sin. No evidence was required. Not even the prosecution of Derek Chauvin, the cop who had held Floyd down while he died, claimed that racism had caused Floyd’s death, yet the nation was told to atone as though it had. From that leap—from the assumed guilt of an individual to the collective damnation of millions—followed everything else. Honest grief curdled into generalized fury. Cities burned, neighbors were turned into enemies, and destruction was mistaken for justice. The narrative was never rational but sacramental: America

The same instincts that exiled teachers and ruined novelists soon found a larger stage. The dominant culture turned private intolerance into public ritual.

was to be purified not through reform but through fire. The nation was condemned wholesale before the facts had even been examined. And once that reflex took hold—the habit of moral certainty without evidence—it could not stop. It hardened into instinct: to see what confirmed the creed as truth,

compassion, its silence progress, its cruelty accountability. They insisted there was no such thing as “woke”; rather it was justice, speaking truth to power, a means of creating accountability. And so they blinded themselves to what they had summoned, even as it feasted before their eyes.

The hungry ghost never comes unannounced, to those who are brave enough to look for it.

The signs of its presence were everywhere, written not in manifestos but in daily humiliations, throughout

and what contradicted it as heresy.

When Charlie Kirk was murdered, that same moral reflex did not falter. It adapted. The instinct that had once turned tragedy into collective guilt now sought to make Kirk’s death the proof that it had been right all along. The same voices that preached repentance after Floyd’s death now implied or stated outright that conservatives themselves had been to blame—that the violence they suffered was merely the harvest of their own hate. Within days, Jimmy Kimmel

suggested that the murderer was part of the right, the claim delivered not as irony but as revelation, within the easy moral theater of late-night television where outrage passes for insight. Meanwhile, a young widow clutched two children—a daughter of three, old enough to keep asking when her daddy was coming home, and a baby boy of one, too young ever to remember his father’s loving gaze. Their grief was met not with solemnity but with levity on national television. For the millions persuaded by the likes of Kimmel, Kirk’s death became not a tragedy but a vindication—another sacrament in the same faith that treats every conservative sin as proof of evil, and every conservative wound as evidence that evil deserved its pain.

Soon the hungry ghost found another voice. On *Piers Morgan Uncensored*, the YouTuber who calls himself Destiny argued that responsibility for Kirk’s murder lay not with the assassin, or the ideology that shaped him, but with Donald Trump and the right as a whole—blaming the only side that had not burned cities or stormed courthouses. It was a familiar inversion: the habit of blaming the victims for provoking their own destruction. It was the same chorus that nodded when Kamala Harris urged donations to bail out rioters in 2020 and described the fires that consumed neighborhoods as “mostly peaceful.”

This is the ideological permission structure for political violence—a moral calculus in which the righteousness of the cause sanctifies the cruelty of the act. Its adherents insist, “I denounce violence, but...” And in that hesitation lies the tacit blessing. Violence becomes deplorable in theory, inevitable in practice—not because it is judged just, but because it is blamed on those who provoke it merely by existing outside the creed. In this logic, every act of left-wing violence is a reaction, every act of right-wing speech a cause. It teaches that violence is tolerable if it advances the narrative, excusable if it serves the faith.

Then came the turn. As leaks began to suggest that the killer had been steeped in radical left-wing ideology, the national press and its allies abruptly changed tone. The certainty of moral judgment gave way to the performance of restraint. Commentators who had once thundered with righteousness now urged the public to wait for the facts—a caution they had never shown when the facts had been theirs to shape. Networks that had once seen hate everywhere suddenly saw nuance; pundits who had called silence violence now found it convenient to be silent. What had been systemic was now treated as exceptional.

What had once been evil became, in their telling, inexplicable. This was an ambiguity born not of doubt but of fear: fear that their own recklessness had gone too far, that the fury they had nursed on the left might now conjure its equal and opposite on the right.

One of the voices who answered the hypocritical left-wing turn toward calculated prudence was Matt Walsh of the *Daily Wire*, a cultural polemicist unflinching in his attacks on progressive dogma. In the after-

This is the ideological permission structure for political violence—a moral calculus in which the righteousness of the cause sanctifies the cruelty of the act.

math of Kirk’s murder, his fury gave voice to millions who felt their outrage mocked or erased. “I could never unite with the left and its allies,” he declared. “They want me dead. They would spit on my grave and laugh in the faces of my wife and children.” His words were raw, visceral, and, in part, righteous. They captured the exhaustion of a movement that has endured years of scorn without striking back—and the moment when the incantations of the national press and its allies stopped working their silencing magic.

The strategy that once choked the voice out of the opposition has begun to devour its authors. To wield moral panic as power is to spend legitimacy faster than it can be replenished, and they have squandered theirs. Their moral theater now convinces only the most faithful. It no longer frightens conservatives, who have learned that the threats of their enemies have become hollow; nor does it sway the undecided, who have begun to see the cruelty beneath the mask of virtue. The dishonesty that once compelled submission now provokes disgust. The charm has broken; the spell is spent.

FOR THE RIGHT, this is both an opportunity—and a warning.

The right may now choose to embody the sanity it once defended—to hold fast to composure, to principle, to persuasion. Or it can inhale the very poison it has opposed. The temptation is strong to strike back, to cancel back, to bully back, to summon the same amorphous rage that consumed its foes. But to do so would be to repeat defeat in a different key—to declare liberal democracy itself irredeemable, to baptize vengeance as virtue, and to inherit not the mantle of justice but the ghosts of the Bolsheviks and Maoists whose tradition their enemies have been heir to for a

decade or more. They too once dreamed of cleansing the world and instead drowned it in blood.

Fury, however justified, is perilous when it collapses into generality. In Walsh's fury, many heard not grief but permission—to brand half the country complicit, to answer pain with contempt. That is how it begins, with the wound to one man swelling into hatred of millions. Those who take that step descend the staircase of temptation into amorphous rage—against “whiteness,” “the patriarchy,” “the left,” “the Democrats”—until abstraction hardens into something concrete, something that can be struck. The neighbor becomes the symbol, the man across the street the effigy.

Walsh is not a radical; his gift has always been to expose radicalism where it festers, as in his documentary called *What Is a Woman?* That is what makes Walsh's fury so dangerous now—not because his intent is malign, but because grief spoken without restraint is always heard by someone else as license.

And so, if we are honest, we must ask ourselves: Do we on the right have the bravery to see whether the hungry ghost now walks among our own ranks, too?

Here the choice must be made plain. Anger at evil is not only permissible but necessary; without it, conservatism decays into passivity. But anger must be tempered into indignation—anchored to truth, disciplined by stewardship—lest it dissolve into amorphous rage. Righteous indignation steels a people to endure; amorphous anger corrodes them from within. It is the difference between Churchill's fury at Nazism, sharpened into defiance that saved Britain, and the Jacobins' rage at “the aristocracy,” incarnadine seething at a formless enemy, a seething that ended up devouring France itself. To collapse indignation into such rage is to mistake

the existing order is already dead—that invites chaos yet to come. Into that void, history always sends its zealots. Marx did not name his victims, yet Lenin and Stalin found them. Abstractions—“the bourgeois,” “the kulak,” “the counterrevolutionary”—became people, and people became corpses.

Unlike Walsh, who speaks in the voice of grief, Yoram Hazony and Patrick Deneen speak in the voice of theory. One is the architect of “National Conservatism”; the other, the author of *Why Liberalism Failed* and *Regime Change*. They command conferences, journals, and lecture halls where conservatism's future is debated. Their tones are calm, their words respectable, but their conclusion is revolutionary: The liberal order itself is hollow, irredeemable, and must be replaced. With this, they step onto the same perilous path they claim to oppose. They are not offering repair in the manner of Edmund Burke but its negation: not preservation but purification, not the *Federalist Papers* but the *Communist Manifesto* with the names reversed. They dream of moral renewal, but that dream begins where every tragedy begins—with the conviction that the inheritance must burn before it can be redeemed.

The consequence can already be seen in Britain. Carl Benjamin, once a liberal critic of extremism, rose to prominence online as “Sargon of Akkad,” defending ordinary values against both the woke left and the alt-right. For a time, he proved that one could resist excess without succumbing to it. His anger was not misplaced: He saw clearly the cowardice of those who excused Islamist intolerance in the name of multiculturalism, and his indignation was the natural response of a man who loved his country and feared for its moral spine. But in time his indignation lost its shape. The righteous

It is that claim—the quiet assertion that the existing order is already dead—that invites chaos yet to come. Into that void, history always sends its zealots.

fury that once sought to defend the liberal order hardened into rage against the order itself. “The problem with the woke left wasn't the woke part, it was the left part,” he declared—a phrase that revealed not opposition to fanaticism but rejection of liberal democracy itself. From there,

the fire that preserves for the fire that consumes.

That same confusion now tempts a new breed of openly reactionary intellectuals. Just like the radical left directing its fury against “the system,” the post-liberal right believes that the Enlightenment experiment at self-rule has failed. In their vision, liberal democracy itself has become the problem: an exhausted vessel, corrupt in essence, destined to fall. They do not call for violence. Like Marx, they simply declare the collapse inevitable. But it is that claim—the quiet assertion that

his anger became identity; resentment supplanted liberty. The “other” was no longer merely the zealot who refused to integrate, but anyone who did not fit a narrowing vision of Englishness. So Benjamin claimed the flag belonged only to those of English blood, and that therefore Jews could never truly be English.

His fall is a tragedy—the loss of a steward who once held the line against extremism, only to join the ranks of those he opposed. His descent is a possible portent for a terrible turn on the American right. His journey shows

how righteous anger can curdle into amorphous rage—when love of home turns into hatred of neighbor, when cultural inheritance is mistaken for ethnic possession, and when a people forgets that the truest test of belonging lies not in ancestry but in allegiance. If Benjamin could fall, any of us could—and if America abandons its inheritance, it could fall further still.

The American right has faced this temptation before. In the 1950s, McCarthyism turned a just fear of Soviet infiltration into a fever of suspicion. Professors, journalists, and public servants were accused of treachery not for what they had done, but for whom they knew. The fight against an enemy abroad became a purge against neighbors at home. At first it gave the right a surge of energy, but in the end it discredited conservatism itself for a generation—blurring the line between vigilance and paranoia, patriotism and persecution—and handed progressives a weapon they have wielded ever since.

Now, after Kirk's murder, that same choice lies before us once more: whether to meet violence with stewardship or with vengeance; whether to conserve a civilization or to consume it.

Today, Anglo-American conservatism stands on a knife's edge: on one side, the ordered tradition of Burke, Churchill, and Reagan; on the other, the amorphous chaos of grievance without providence. Some institutions have already fallen—the Heritage Foundation, once a guardian of principle, now a vessel for resentment; The Federalist website, which thrives on outrage more than order. Others waver: *First Things*, once a serious voice of religious conservatism, now tempted by integralist dreams; even parts of the evangelical movement, uncertain whether to preserve or to destroy. Yet some remain faithful—the Hudson Institute, *National Review*, the Free Press, and civic institutions that remember what conservatism truly is. But even the faithful must remain watchful and must speak out. The hungry ghost is not banished by silence; it grows in the dark, waiting until the moment it erupts. Institutions, like men, can be overtaken by that shadow if they mistake resentment for principle or mistake generalized vengeance for principled justice. When they do, they no longer preserve the inheritance but profane it—corroding the covenant they were entrusted to defend.

The temptation to meet radicalism with radicalism is not new. History offers a clearer lesson. Churchill and Reagan both understood that endurance, not escalation, defeats extremism: that when your adversary is destroying himself, the worst mistake is to join him in the flames. The same truth applies now. The national press and its allies are already consumed by the hysteria they unleashed, their moral authority collapsing beneath the weight of their own hypocrisy. The task of conservatives is not to mirror that collapse, but to outlast it—to hold

At this hour conservatives must choose. Will we be stewards of a civilization—or spectators at its funeral pyre? Ours is not the rejection of anger, but its refinement.

fast to steadiness while the frenzy burns itself out.

Today's left-wing radicals have attacked, murdered, and poisoned public life. Yet compared with the storms our grandparents weathered, their violence is a lesser gale. And if we meet it with the same discipline—gratitude for what we have, faith in who we are, endurance in what we defend—then we shall prevail as surely as they did. For the inheritance we hold is not a relic but a living covenant: written in liberty, guarded in patience, renewed in hope. It is the hearth our forebears kept alight through war and tyranny, the trust they placed in us not to squander in fury but to hand on, undiminished. Let radicals rage and consume themselves; our charge is steadier and more enduring.

At this hour conservatives must choose. Will we be stewards of a civilization—or spectators at its funeral pyre? Ours is not the rejection of anger, but its refinement—the transfiguration of grief into righteous indignation rather than its descent into amorphous rage. Indignation anchors itself to stewardship and memory; rage anchors itself to nothing and so consumes everything. If we confuse the two, we cease to conserve and begin to corrode. But if we make anger into covenant, it becomes a flame that steels without destroying—a fire that endures when rage has burned itself to ash.

The flame endures, if we do. But if we yield it to rage, it will not be civilization's light that survives, but its ashes. That was the question left burning on the night Charlie Kirk fell—and it remains the question by which our civilization will stand or fall. 📖➡

Moynihan's Warning, the World's Folly, and Israel's Resilience

Half a century since the 'Zionism is racism' resolution,
where do we stand?

By Gil Troy

FIFTY YEARS AGO, on November 10, 1975, the United Nations passed General Assembly Resolution 3379. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, rose to his feet and delivered one of the most famous speeches in

American history. "The United States," he thundered, "does not acknowledge, it will not abide by, it will never acquiesce in this infamous act."

Moynihan made "one point, and one point only." Zionism "is not and cannot be 'a form of racism,'" he said, quoting the resolution's most important clause. It cannot be, Moynihan said, because the Jews are not a *race*. Judaism accepts religious converts, who join the Jewish people. Judaism thus combines peoplehood and faith. That makes Zionism one of the most permeable, least biologically based forms of nationalism—because it is defined not necessarily "by birth" but by "belief."

Moynihan recognized that Resolution 3379 was anti-Semitic, not "just" anti-Zionist. He also under-

GIL TROY, a senior fellow in Zionist thought at the Jewish People Policy Institute, is the author of Moynihan's Moment: America's Fight Against Zionism as Racism. His latest e-book, The Essential Guide to Zionism, Anti-Zionism, Antisemitism and Jew-Hatred, can be downloaded on the JPPI Website.

With its perverse Soviet-orchestrated distortions of language, history, and reality, Resolution 3379 ‘reeked of the totalitarian mind,’ noted Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

stood that the resolution was an attempt to demean America by demeaning its ally. He repudiated what he would later call this “Big Red Lie” as an assault on democracy and decency. And he warned that this libel would enter the international bloodstream. With this lie now UN-certified, Moynihan warned that, in future conflicts, “whether Israel was responsible, Israel surely would be blamed: openly by some, privately by most. Israel would be *regretted*.”

His prophecy has been fulfilled. Zionism-is-racism is the foundation stone of anti-Semitic anti-Zionism. On the 50th anniversary of the Moynihan speech, we should pay tribute to his vision, his understanding, and the significance of his warning—because it demonstrates how evil can flourish over time. The UN actually repealed the resolution in 1991, but the damage had already been done. As progressives in the West embraced intersectionality and the oppressor-oppressed binary, Israel became their object lesson.

For his part, Moynihan said he backed Israel “for reasons that had almost nothing to do with it.” He was actually defending America and liberalism—smelling the anti-Americanism and illiberalism shaping anti-Zionism. A lifelong liberal Democrat, he blasted self-hating leftists who denounced America, and he also rejected starchy conservatives who were demanding he act “diplomatically.”

“What is this word ‘toning down’; when you are faced with an out-right lie about the United States and we go in and say this is not true. Now, how do you tone that down? Do you say it is only half untrue?” he asked. “What kind of people are we? What kind of people do they think we are?” In 1976, he would attain a U.S. Senate seat by insisting that “this is a society worth defending,” using a phrase coined by his aide, Suzanne Weaver Garment.

Looking abroad, he wondered: What’s wrong with “the accusers”? With its perverse Soviet-orchestrated distortions of language, history, and reality, Resolution 3379 “reeked of the totalitarian mind, stank of the totalitarian state.”

It was and is the Great Inversion—and Perversion. Despite being mass-murdered by Nazi racists, Jews became racists. Despite resisting Ottoman, and then British, colonialism controlling their indigenous homeland, Zionists then became settler-colonialists.

Despite there being many dark-skinned Israelis and light-skinned Palestinians, Israelis became “white oppressors,” racializing this nationalist clash. And despite enduring history’s largest genocide, Jews were and are accused of “genocide.”

Clearly, much anti-Zionism reflects blind hatred, transcending the complicated dilemmas every country faces. In his 1968 classic *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812*, the historian Winthrop Jordan analyzed the “process of debasement” that created a “we” against a “they” in early America, which turned the “Negro” into a slave. Similarly, the Zionism-is-racism charge demonized Israel, Zionism, and the Jews in its determination to make the Jewish state a pariah.

Over a half century beginning with the Moynihan speech, Soviet atheists and anti-Christian Islamists diabolically concocted a charge that both updated and masked classic Christian anti-Semitic tropes. Pre-modern Europe deemed Jews the ultimate villains; Zionism-is-racism cast Israel, the collective Jew, as committing today’s ultimate crime. The medieval Church called Jews “Christ killers”; Zionism-is-racism accused Israel, the collective Jew, of slaying innocent Palestinians. And just as old-fashioned demagogues rallied the masses against the individual Jew, Zionism-is-racism united a fragmented developing world and political left against Israel, the collective Jew.

Three weeks before the General Assembly vote in 1975, the Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the United Nations (also known as the “Third Committee”) approved this Soviet and Arab resolution singling out one form of nationalism, Jewish nationalism, in that forum of nationalisms, as “racism.” The Palestine Liberation Organization’s deputy representative, Hasan Abdel Rahman, compared Zionism to “Nazism in the sense that it was trying to exterminate the Palestinian people.”

Leonard Garment, America’s representative to the UN Human Rights Commission, sought “the most provocative” word to respond to the charge. He wanted to convey that “it’s something dirty... a piece of pornography.” That’s why he denounced this “obscene act,” saying it placed “the work of the United Nations in jeopardy.”

The UN was devaluing the currency of human rights. This “terrible lie...will have terrible conse-

In branding Zionism ‘racist’ while accusing Israel of practicing apartheid like the despised South Africa, Soviet and Arab propagandists hit an ideological gusher.

quences,” Moynihan warned. When the language of human rights is “perverted,” if “we destroy the words that were given to us by past centuries, we will not have words to replace them.”

Still, in branding Zionism “racist” while accusing Israel of practicing apartheid like the despised South African regime, Soviet and Arab propagandists hit an ideological gusher. They linked Zionism to the two “perfect racisms”: Nazi racism and Apartheid racism. “It was these two ideas—the Israelis as Nazis and the Israelis as white imperialists—which were brought together with such brazen neatness in the identification of Zionism with racism,” Norman Podhoretz would write in COMMENTARY.

Israel became “the fashionable enemy,” the historian Bernard Lewis would note. The charge resonated with the times while deviating from the truth. After colonialism largely collapsed and America’s civil rights movement mostly succeeded by the beginning of the 1970s, Moynihan explained, “racism was the one offense international society universally condemned.”

Over 70 percent of Americans applauded Moynihan’s counterattack; the UN’s reputation in America still hasn’t recovered. On the new hit show *Saturday Night* (it became *Saturday Night Live* in 1977), the comedian Chevy Chase reported: “The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed Zionism to be racism. The black entertainer Sammy Davis Jr., who recently converted to Judaism, said, ‘What a breakthrough, I can finally hate myself.’”

Even the prominent anti-Zionist Noam Chomsky repudiated Resolution 3379’s “profound hypocrisy, given the nature of the states that backed it (including the Arab states).” Chomsky also objected to “referring to Zionism as *such* rather than the policies of the State of Israel.”

In 1975, only 30 years from Auschwitz, the floodwalls that the West had erected against Jew-hatred were breached. The UN, founded as World War II ended to prevent another world war, another Holocaust, another Jew-hating frenzy, now targeted the Jews.

Few then believed that these critics were “only” anti-Zionist in coloration. Most recognized that Judaism and Zionism were intertwined, while noticing the Jew-hating glee of the Communist and Arab nations in attacking the Jewish state. The *Wall Street Journal*

feared that the resolution would “restore respectability to the dormant irrational hatred of the Jewish people.”

With the bully’s instinctive genius, the haters understood what would hurt Israel’s reputation most—and what the world would swallow easily. They showed how to foist broadly-agreed-upon aversions—to racism, to genocide—onto the Jews. Many black Americans were alarmed to see the justifiable abhorrence of racism, that biologically based hatred, hijacked and re-directed against Jews. The civil rights activist Bayard Rustin predicted that the term “racism” would become an all-purpose, meaningless epithet “in international discussions,” like SOB “in personal relations.”

The Zionism-is-racism charge had everything to do with the Soviet and Palestinian mindsets. Communist propagandists enjoyed manipulating words to trigger “Pavlovian” responses, the Princeton Kremlinologist Robert Tucker observed; their “ultimate weapon of political control would be the dictionary.” Terms like “racism,” “colonialism,” and “imperialism” came straight from the Communist playbook. They obscured the reality in the Middle East, which was a clash of two emerging nationalisms after two imperial powers collapsed: the Ottoman Empire, then Great Britain.

While popularizing the Palestinian cause through terrorist brutality, the PLO’s Yasir Arafat and his allies launched an ideological war, too. The Columbia University academic Edward Said warned Arafat that if the conflict remained local, they’d lose. They needed to exploit the global mass media’s herd mentality, he advised. Join “the universal political struggle against colonialism and imperialism,” with the Palestinians as freedom fighters paralleling “Vietnam, Algeria, Cuba, and black Africa.”

Israel’s post-Six-Day War territorial expansion helped Said frame Israel as “an occupying power,” not “simply a Jewish state,” in a 1979 manifesto titled *The Question of Palestine*. Alleging racial discrimination as the key motive was a means of transforming the “Zionist settler in Palestine... from an implacably silent master into an analogue of white settlers in Africa.” That charge gained traction in a post-Sixties universe of civil rights, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and Western self-abnegation.

Elie Wiesel, the most famous Holocaust survivor,

On the worst day in modern Israeli history, Zionism was vindicated. On October 7, the Israeli government failed. The IDF failed. But Zionism succeeded.

decoded anti-Semitism's methodology. "To prepare 'solutions' to the 'Jewish problem,' the first step was to divorce the Jew from mankind," he wrote in his 1978 book, *A Jew Today*. Calling Israel "racist" reignited the process of ostracizing, demonizing, then dehumanizing, which in the 1940s had caused the Holocaust. Wiesel dismissed the claim that "this is not about Jews, this is about Zionists," writing: "They try to divide us, to pit us against the other after having pitted us against the world." Instead, Jewish history teaches that "whenever one Jewish community is threatened, all others are in danger."

Riding the anti-racism movement's momentum, the Israel-bashers made an important rhetorical shift. "Racial discrimination is a practice, racism is a doctrine," Moynihan noted. Countries can change discriminatory policies, but racist ideologies had to be destroyed—along with any country founded on that evil. This sweeping essentialist charge had exterminationist implications. Leveling the "more serious" racism charge shifted from targeting what Israel did to what Zionism was. This shift from the transactional to the ontological—Israel's identity—paved the way for today's genocide charge and the attempt to make Israel a pariah.

Robin Shepherd, a British journalist, remembers campaigns to ban Jewish student societies in London universities in the late 1980s and early 1990s, using the "justification" that "Zionism was racism." He recalls: "It was a charge that would put anyone with even mildly pro-Israeli leanings right on the back foot. It was a verbal jab to the chin. It was a way of telling you to conform to the anti-Israel orthodoxy or be vilified."

Having found Zionism existentially guilty, opponents easily added other essentialist indictments, culminating in today's rhetoric libeling Zionism as "settler-colonialism" and Israel as an "oppressor." Anti-Zionism has flourished for many reasons. Still, the Zionism-is-racism charge was today's original sin. Outlasting the Soviet Union's collapse, the claim keeps the Jewish state on permanent probation—the only state whose legitimacy is contingent on its good behavior.

This totalitarian anti-Zionism helped Western elites cast Palestinians as noble, oppressed, disenfranchised people of color and Israelis as ignoble, oppressive, racist whites. It helped progressives ignore the Palestinian national movement's violence, Islamism,

sexism, and homophobia. The Red-Green alliance united leftists with Islamists, and Moynihan's "Big Red Lie" became the "Big Red-Green Lie" that refuses to die.

FIFTY YEARS LATER, and despite the resolution's repeal nearly 34 years ago, many believe that the Israel-bashers have won, since the Zionism-is-racism libel is trending worldwide.

Yet anti-Zionism keeps failing as Zionism and Israel thrive. In 1975, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin used the enmity to unite his people. "Zionism, Judaism, the State of Israel, and the Jewish people are one," he said, locating the pull to the Land of Israel and the longing to return to Zion at Judaism's core. Israeli cities rechristened "United Nations Street"—so named in November 1947—as "Zionism Street." Thousands of schoolchildren protested, with Golda Meir explaining Zionism to 10,000 high school pupils in Tel Aviv. Students distributed half a million buttons proclaiming: "I AM A ZIONIST."

Similarly, decades later, on the worst day in modern Israeli history, Zionism was vindicated. On October 7, the Israeli government failed. The IDF failed. But Zionism succeeded. Zionism never promised a state on "a silver platter"—a warning by Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann. If Zionism began as a national survival strategy for the Jewish people, it worked that day as a call to immediate and vital action. The thousands of Israelis who mobilized and repelled the jihadi marauders represented a living, breathing, dynamic Zionism no libels can touch. By giving the Jews an ideology and a methodology, Zionism motivated Israelis to fight and ensured that they were sufficiently well trained and well armed to save Israel.

Simultaneously, October 7 unleashed waves of Zionist activism worldwide. Within weeks, Diaspora Jews contributed a billion dollars. Missions kept visiting Israel, bringing helmets and Kevlar vests, socks, and home-baked cookies. Washington, D.C., hosted the largest Jewish protest in American history, with 290,000 marchers and another 250,000 joining via livestream.

The fighting in Israel, the volunteering and donating throughout the Jewish world, reflected the Zionist ethos of self-defense. But something more spiritual happened, too. Even Theodor Herzl understood that

The fighting in Israel, the volunteering and donating throughout the Jewish world, reflected the Zionist ethos of self-defense. But something more spiritual happened, too.

Zionism would not just revive the Jewish body but the Jewish soul as well. “Zionism,” he said, “is a return to Jewishness even before there is a return to the Jewish land.”

As Jew-hatred surged, Jewish leaders described “the surge” in communal engagement and identity. From Hillels to synagogues to day schools, rates of participation and passion peaked.

In Israel, the patriotism—and the mourning—triggered a profound Zionist revival. Hundreds of stickers immortalizing fallen soldiers’ defining slogans decorate Israel’s public spaces with medleys of Zionist ideas and sensibilities. Some are Zionist classics, including *Am Yisrael Chai* (the Jewish people live) or *Ain Li Eretz Acharet* (I have no other homeland). Some are more personal but deeply Zionist, including “We chose to make aliyah to this land, we won’t let anyone hurt it.”

Most reflect a gritty, resilient generation of New Jews living the Zionist dream. Many urge their survivors to maintain Israel’s characteristic love of life: “be happy,” “be good.” Evoking the traditional phrase *ve-samachata be’chagecha* (delight in your holidays), one sticker reads: *ve-samachata be’chayecha* (delight in your life). Others are feistier, explaining, “Soldiers don’t love what they do, they learn to love what they must do,” insisting that it “doesn’t matter what happens, you’ll get over it.” Crossbreeding optimism and fortitude, that well-known Israeli phrase *yehiyei be-seder* assures: It’ll be all right.

This Zionist revival rests on three pillars:

- First, although Jew-haters don’t make the Jew—the Jew makes the Jew—the Jews can’t make Jew-haters disappear without fighting back. Rather than being defensive, one must champion genuine liberalism. *Social Justice Zionism* or *Liberal Zionism* should seek to rescue “social justice” and “liberalism” from the illiberal liberals. True social justice begins with rejecting all bigotry, articulating an egalitarian liberalism recognizing everyone’s inherent rights and dignity, without romanticizing those deemed “oppressed” and demonizing the supposed “oppressors.”

- Second, *Responsibility Zionism* expresses the Zionist commitment to Jewish self-determination. Caring Zionists must assess what Israel and the Jewish people need to flourish, internally. Responsibility Zionism is rebuilding Israel’s south after the Hamas attack—and the oft-neglected north, wounded by decades of Hezbollah fire from Lebanon. It’s trying to make Israel’s politics and society worthy of the soldiers, the reservists, the volunteers, and their families. And it’s tree planting, not firefighting; being proactive, not just reactive.
- Finally, *Identity Zionism* builds from the “I” to the “us.” In an age of alienation, of what Émile Durkheim the sociologist called anomie, in a throwaway society where many feel disposable and can easily cancel others, Zionism emphasizes history, identity, continuity, community—roots and ties. Zionism offers a Jewish counterculture improving on the outside world while cultivating a broad, unifying, welcoming peoplehood platform for the Jewish world. Secular Jews can find meaning without God, and religious Jews can build a broader sense of belonging.

Fifty years ago, Moynihan’s colleague at the UN, Israeli Ambassador Chaim Herzog, called Zionism “nothing more—and nothing less—than the Jewish people’s sense of origin and destination in the land, linked eternally with its name.” He went on: “It is also the instrument whereby the Jewish nation seeks an authentic fulfilment of itself.” He stood in the UN on that November day, representing “a strong and flourishing people which has survived” all the haters before “and which will survive this shameful exhibition.” Herzog then ripped up the resolution.

Zionists worldwide will continue seeking authentic fulfillment for their people and themselves. And they should challenge everyone to transcend today’s deep-rooted anti-Zionist mania, disdaining it, in Herzog’s words, as just another “passing episode in a rich and an event-filled history.” ➤



Politics & Ideas

Hear Him Roar

***Lions and Scavengers:
The True Story of America
(and Her Critics)***

BY BEN SHAPIRO

Threshold Editions, 256 pages

Reviewed by IRINA VELITSKAYA

IN THE CLOSING acknowledgments of his new book, *Lions and Scavengers: The True Story of America*, Ben Shapiro declares, “Some books are suffused with a cold objectivity. Others are written at white heat. This book was written passionately, because we live in shockingly turbu-

IRINA VELITSKAYA *attends the University of California, Berkeley, where she is studying biblical Hebrew, ancient Greek, and Near Eastern history.*

lent times, and because the truth has never been more urgently necessary.”

He is stating, in other words, that his book is a polemic. Some polemics are tendentious, slapdash, indifferently sourced rants. Others are essential—the rhetorical equivalents of a ship’s lookout sounding the alarm at the sudden appearance of an enormous iceberg. Shapiro’s book fits into the latter category, although the peril that faces our civilization is not an iceberg but a swarm of pirates.

Does this sound a bit melodramatic? So be it. The pirates, or “Scavengers,” in Shapiro’s terminology, are those individuals and institutions in Western cultures, increasingly ascendant, who valorize terrorism and political violence, worship at the altar of Marx, favor the takers rather than the makers, and believe that wealth and success are, by defi-

nition, evidence of evil-doing.

As many have noted, the dominant notion in modern intellectual discourse, incubated in our universities and cultural institutions, is that the powerful are automatically evil and the powerless are inherently good. It’s an incredibly simple, and simplistic, notion, despite all the post hoc intellectual appurtenances attached to it by radical thinkers ranging from Edward Said and Frantz Fanon to modern-day leftist fashionistas such as Noam Chomsky and Judith Butler.

The effectiveness and pervasiveness of this worldview is illustrated every day in our news media, where the sins of the powerful are quite rightly excoriated while the sins of the supposedly powerless are either excused away or, more often, utterly ignored.

The very simplicity of the message “Western civilization bad” is the reason for its success and uncritical acceptance on our college campuses and, increasingly, among Western leaders. It’s a message that appeals to primal human emotions such as envy and guilt (though wealthy radicals believe they can easily expiate their guilt by declaring a “land acknowledgment” and bellowing “Free Palestine!”) and takes advantage of these leaders’ wish to be, or at least to appear, decent, fair-minded, and “empathetic.”

Shapiro, editor emeritus of *The Daily Wire* and host of the podcast *The Ben Shapiro Show*, has set out to flip the script on the radicals. Too often, defenders of capitalism and Western freedoms have gotten bogged down in patient explanations and defenses (not that these aren’t necessary) rather than creating a simple and comprehensible framework for understanding why postcolonial Western civilization, despite its manifest shortcomings, is superior to its alternatives. This is doubly true for the defenders of Israel, who find themselves constantly engaged in running skirmishes and dead-end debates with naive or bad-faith actors about non-existent “apartheid” and “settler colonialism” instead of engaging in a full-throated and confident defense of the only free democracy in the region.

Shapiro’s effervescent intelligence, adherence to traditional values, and his boyish, earnest, debate team persona combine to make him seem both deeply sincere and utterly uncool. The latter, I suspect, is something Shapiro doesn’t care about, and that is decidedly to his credit. He is a moderate thinker who writes with immoderate passion.

LIONS AND SCAVENGERS is divided into eight chapters, each one devoted to a specific aspect of the ongoing war be-

tween the “Lions,” who create and protect, and seek answers instead of excuses, and the “Scavengers,” who “leech off the true productivity of the Lions” and “would rather everyone be equal in misery than that everyone be unequal in prosperity.”

The Scavengers, Shapiro writes, “are creatures of envy. They are creatures of *ressentiment*. They are creatures of destruction.” In a chapter set in England—Ground Zero of Western civilization’s gradual devolution—Shapiro writes, “We see them. We see the rivers of humanity, their fists raised, their flags of third-world countries and terror groups held aloft, the hatred in their eyes, climbing our monuments and defacing them, ripping down our flags and replacing them with their own. We hear them chant for our eradication, their screaming voices raised in ecstatic frenzy, the stamping of their feet as they march in unison against us. We feel their venom, their senseless and ceaseless animosity, their blame, their shame, their rage. They are all around us.”

The Lions, however, are persons of faith, family, and hard work, the builders of the very structures that the Scavengers are simultaneously parasitizing, vandalizing, and pulling down. That destruction is accelerating, and the Lions are losing faith in their mission under a constant assault of criticism, mockery, and social media subversion. Most of all, they are being weakened by the manner in which the left uses the lions’ own moral scruples and rules of law against them.

The moral jujitsu of the left is exemplified by the current outrage about supposed Israeli war crimes. “The Scavenger has one tool, and one tool only: the decency of his enemy,” writes Shapiro. He goes on:

Relying on the Lions to abide by a more humane war code, the Scavengers exploit that same

code: If the Lion worries about killing too many civilians, the Scavenger cloaks himself as a civilian while engaging in military activity; if the Lion is concerned about collateral damage, the Scavenger seeks to maximize civilian casualties so as to magnify that concern; if the Lion seeks to pacify the local population via positive incentives, the Scavenger seeks to maximize the suffering of that local population to magnify threat. The Lion is forced to play defense rather than to attack, bound by his adherence to a code the Scavenger denies but insists that the Lion apply, no matter the circumstances.

Though Shapiro’s message is deliberately simple, this is not a simplistic book. While Shapiro’s own words are impassioned, his arguments are buttressed by copious quotations from a virtual Hall of Fame of conservative thinkers such as Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk, Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, and G.K. Chesterton, among many others. It is also exhaustively footnoted.

A true moderate, Shapiro doesn’t hesitate to slam the repellent conspiracists of the right such as Tucker Carlson and Alex Jones. In a chapter on sexual mores, Shapiro notes that “a reactionary ‘manosphere’ Conspiracy Theory has emerged on the Right to match the transgressive Lechery of the Left ... [that is] trollish dumbassery.” Regarding the MAGA movement and Trumpism, Shapiro proceeds with some degree of caution, if not delicacy. He defends Trump’s record on foreign policy, but, for the most part, the current administration is avoided. The book is more civilizational than it is political, after all.

I must admit to a personal admiration for Shapiro and this book, for three interlocking reasons. First, I

am a refugee from Russia, which, in both its Soviet and post-Soviet incarnations, is the ultimate scavenger society. Second, I am able to witness the creeping acceptance of scavenger parasitism in my daily life in the leftist bastion of Oakland, California. Within 15 minutes of first arriving at my apartment here, my car windows were smashed, and every item of any value was stolen. The police, needless to say, barely mustered the energy to shrug.

The third reason is the most important. As a student of ancient history at Berkeley, I have learned that great civilizations can be destroyed by a single, simple idea that is seductive, satisfying, and disastrously in error. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" ended up enslaving half of the world. Yet this unworkable notion is, to this day, being revived by the likes of Zohran Mamdani and

his army of TikTok acolytes.

That Marxist cliché, as well as one or two other pernicious nostrums such as "be nice to your enemies, and they will be nice back" and "the poor and the powerless are entitled to be violent," is really all that's driving the radical mobs marching through the metropolises of the West. Everything else is either cosplay, a lie, or an excuse.

This is not to say that the radical left does not have a great many cogent critiques of capitalist societies. Beginning with Marx onward, the intellectuals of the left have provided incisive and well-merited criticism of certain Western values and practices. It's just that they rarely offer workable alternatives. (What economic system actually works better than capitalism? What would a "free" Palestine actually look like?) There is, indeed, little concern on the left about effective

alternatives. The predominant message is "We'll tear everything down first and worry about what replaces it later."

So Ben Shapiro need make no apology for opposing simple errors in simple terms. We need many more Ben Shapiro's to speak out with moral clarity. Right now, Shapiro and a few others are our modern-day Cassandras. It's a role that has been thrust upon them by the silence or moral equivocations of academics, pundits, and politicians.

Aldous Huxley once said, "The course of every intellectual, if he pursues his journey long and unflinchingly enough, ends in the obvious, from which the non-intellectuals have never stirred." *Lions and Scavengers* is sometimes highly emotional, exceedingly plain-spoken, and determinedly old-fashioned—even "obvious." And it is just what our critically endangered civilization needs. 🦁



Lewis Galantière was a mentor to Hemingway, a Federal Reserve Bank Economist, President of PEN America, Member of the Council on Foreign Relations, WW2 Head of the French Office of War Information, St. Exupéry writing collaborator, and ACLU Director. And while everyone believed that he was a lapsed Catholic with degrees from French and German universities he was, in fact, a Jewish boy from the Chicago ghetto who didn't graduate grade school.

This valuable portrait of Galantière is a compelling tale, well-told for the first time." - H. R. Stoneback, *Distinguished Professor of English, The State University of New York; Past President, Ernest Hemingway Foundation & Society.*

Galantière could have sprung full-grown from a novel by Saul Bellow: a fantastical creature whose most successful fiction was himself.
- Rosanna Warren, *Hanna Holborn Gray Distinguished Service Professor, The Univ. of Chicago*

Visit www.Mark-Lurie.com for information, reviews and links to audiobook sellers.

Unruly Sunstein

On Liberalism: In Defense of Freedom

By CASS R. SUNSTEIN
MIT Press, 208 pages

Reviewed by
MICHAEL A. WORONOFF

CLASSICAL liberalism rests on a deceptively simple premise: Humans flourish best when left largely unfettered by the state. The philosophy's core principles form the backbone of political freedom and economic growth in the West. Adherence to its values has yielded astounding increases in prosperity and personal autonomy.

Today in the United States, the label "liberal" has veered far from its roots. The term is now used to describe everything from social-democratic largesse to technocratic management of the economy. Worse, the classical-liberal commitment to individual liberty is beset on all sides—by the left's zeal for regulatory paternalism, and by the populist right's enthusiasm for wielding state power against perceived cultural enemies. Both threaten to trade procedural freedoms and open debate for dogma and control.

As a result, if ever there was a time when classical liberalism needed a robust, unapologetic defense, this is it.

Cass Sunstein seems an unlikely candidate to accept this challenge.

MICHAEL A. WORONOFF, a member of COMMENTARY's board, practices law in Los Angeles.

Throughout the Obama years, Sunstein served as the administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. While there, he embraced the expansion of federal administrative power, backing rules based on dubious cost-benefit analyses and promoting interventions designed to shape American behavior in the direction he and his colleagues deemed optimal.

But accept the challenge he does, in his most recent book, *On Liberalism: In Defense of Freedom*. The resulting work is ambitious in scope but flawed in execution, as Sunstein attempts to smuggle progressive governance principles into classical liberalism's intellectual framework. The text contains much that is sensible. Sunstein's diagnosis of modern political dysfunction is accurate. He identifies the threat posed by censorious progressives who have abandoned commitments to free speech and pluralism in favor of tribal identity politics and ideological orthodoxy. He also highlights the danger from illiberal forces on the right who would use state power to enforce their vision of the common good, whether through protectionist trade measures or constraints on cultural expression.

Sunstein's strongest moments come in the first chapter, which he calls the "heart of the book," adapted from a "manifesto" that appeared in the *New York Times*. The remaining chapters are also derived from earlier writings. Some of these sources are at most tangentially related to the book's subject. As a result, his declared goal of "pro-

ducing... a relatively unified text" from previously published work is only sporadically successful and a bit factitious.

The manifesto contains 85 propositions. The first identifies six beliefs he declares all liberals value: "freedom, human rights, pluralism, security, the rule of law, and democracy." Subsequent propositions identify other tenets of classical liberalism, including the primacy of individual dignity, the necessity of freedom of expression and viewpoint diversity, and the importance of free markets and private property rights.

While Sunstein demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the Enlightenment tradition, he insists on having it both ways. He identifies as a champion of individual worth and free choice, but advocates policies that regard ordinary citizens as children who cannot be trusted to decide for themselves.

For example, in one proposition, Sunstein acknowledges that "liberals prize free markets" as "an important means by which people exercise their agency." But he immediately pirouettes, claiming in another that many liberals "downplay the centrality of free markets" and champion intervention to safeguard individuals from "harms" they would choose to inflict on themselves. These "liberals" might applaud, as an illustration, former NYC Mayor Bloomberg's crusade against Big Gulps, which treated adult consumers as incapable of making well-advised decisions when buying soft drinks.

Sunstein's willingness to meddle in markets goes beyond interventions designed to protect individuals from self-imposed harm. Implausibly asserting that most liberals "do not regard freedom of contract as sacrosanct," he argues for all manner of restrictions on consensual human exchanges. Consider his tortured logic on minimum wage laws, which restrict the

freedom of both employers and workers, prohibiting the unemployed from working for wages they might eagerly accept. Sunstein maintains that these laws are somehow liberal because they do “not superimpose regulation on a realm of purely voluntary interactions, but merely substitute one form of regulation for another.” He blithely equates (liberal) legal frame works that defend uncoerced exchange and (illiberal) government mandates that override the terms parties would freely negotiate.

His treatment of property rights is similarly nonsensical. Sunstein includes a proposition declaring liberals place significant value on property rights, believing them to be “exceedingly important” because they provide freedom, security, and independence. But again, Sunstein spins, classifying broad government redistributions of wealth and other moves toward socialism as “liberal,” even though these actions necessarily confiscate private property. This doesn’t add up. If property rights matter deeply, major violations of those rights cannot be considered part of the liberal tradition.

Sunstein contends liberals can back government paternalism, Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, the contemporary administrative state, and other regulatory apparatus, all of which classical liberals find abhorrent.

The problem isn’t hypocrisy. It’s intellectual confusion. Sunstein appears unable to perceive the contradictions between his stated principles and his preferred policies. These contradictions permeate the book.

FOLLOWING HIS manifesto, Sunstein continues with an extended discussion of John Stuart Mill’s concept of “experiments in living.” Mill observed that, because humans are imperfect, they

 The problem isn’t hypocrisy. It’s intellectual confusion. Cass R. Sunstein appears unable to perceive the contradictions between his stated principles and his preferred policies. These contradictions permeate his book.

have a wide variety of opinions. As a result, “there should be different experiments of living,” and “free scope should be given to varieties of character.”

Mill understood that diverse approaches to life benefit both the individual and society as a whole. People learn from their own choices, even (or perhaps especially) when those choices are unconventional. Equally important, they gain insight by observing others’ experiments, which can offer new models of human flourishing or serve as cautionary illustrations of paths better avoided. This diversity of experience, Mill argued, acts as “the chief ingredient of individual and social progress.” To safeguard this right to experiment, Mill articulated his “harm principle,” asserting that “the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his

will, is to prevent harm to others.”

Sunstein claims to embrace Mill’s “experiments in living” philosophy but dismisses the “harm principle,” proclaiming that one “should have no trouble with laws that require people to buckle their seatbelts ... or to save money for retirement.”

Mill conceived the “harm principle” not as a suggestion (as Sunstein sees it) but as a bulwark against paternalistic meddling by the state. Mill believed that the government has no business protecting competent adults from their own selections, however foolish they appear.

Sunstein asserts we can distinguish between “genuine experiments of living,” which should be guarded from state interference, and decisions that “clearly lack that character,” which are fair game. Sunstein never supplies the criteria for determining which decisions deserve protection and which do not, perhaps because the task is impossible.

The determination of how much to save for retirement may strike Sunstein as insignificant, but it represents something profound: the right to make one’s own judgments about risk and consumption preferences, and the appropriate relationship between citizen and state.

Sunstein further reveals how far he has drifted from Mill’s views in his discussion of whether a majority should be able to override the right to experiment. He proposes a concept he calls “experiments of living constitutionalism,” a method of constitutional interpretation that is deferential to “democratic processes.” According to Sunstein, “if Congress or a state legislature has made a reasonable decision, supporters of experiments of living constitutionalism might well be cautious before rejecting it. You can believe in an experiment of living without being a fanatic.”

Sunstein misses the point of constitutional rights, which is to defend

minority activity against tyrannical majoritarian override. These protections should shield experimentation from democratic interference, not defer to it. There is nothing fanatical about this.

Sunstein's confusion extends beyond personal liberty to economic freedom. The classical-liberal tradition holds economic liberty not just instrumentally worthwhile but as a valuable end in itself. Interference with economic liberty directly violates the individual's dignity as a self-governing moral agent.

Ignoring this essential insight, Sunstein dismisses economic freedom as "a presumption" that can be "overcome" by findings in behavioral economics. He argues that cognitive biases cause people to make economic decisions that work against their interests, thereby justifying wide-ranging government intervention in these decisions.

Sunstein's diagnosis rests on a shaky foundation. Behavioral economics literature is plagued by publication bias and methodological flaws that have led to a devastating "replication crisis," the systematic inability of others to reproduce published findings. Rather than evidence-based policy, Sunstein relies on policy-based evidence, his predetermined regulatory preferences leading to after-the-fact "scientific" justification.

Sunstein's remedy is no better founded. He calls for "behaviorally informed regulators" who "nudge" people toward superior choices through carefully designed "choice architectures." When gentle nudges prove insufficient, Sunstein endorses outright "mandates and bans."

Nudge theory, which Sunstein developed with Richard Thaler, presumes that enlightened experts can identify optimal life choices for millions of strangers and then guide them toward predetermined outcomes. Sunstein's confidence in

 The author fails to grasp that classical liberalism's genius lies not in assuming perfect human judgment, but in designing institutions that channel imperfect choices toward beneficial outcomes better than experts can.

this ability runs counter to Friedrich Hayek's essential insight about the limits of central planning. Planning fails not from ill intentions but from planners' inability to access the dispersed and rapidly changing knowledge required for intelligent decisions about complex social systems.

Of course, human beings sometimes choose paths they later regret. But government representatives face the same cognitive biases and incentive problems as everyone else, yet they lack access to the local knowledge people possess about their own circumstances, preferences, constraints, and opportunities. In the absence of this information, how can these representatives be better at determining optimal choices than the affected individuals?

Untroubled by this question, Sunstein's faith in experts remains

unshaken by decades of policy failures, from urban renewal to Covid lockdowns to the homelessness crisis. He fails to grasp that classical liberalism's genius lies not in assuming perfect human judgment, but in designing institutions, such as competitive markets and property rights, that channel imperfect choices toward beneficial outcomes better than experts can.

Furthermore, by manipulating decision contexts while preserving the illusion of choice, nudging violates the principle of informed consent that should govern citizen-government relations. It's coercion with a smile, allowing paternalists to avoid the uncomfortable label of authoritarianism.

Long ago, Milton Friedman identified the primary driver of the interventionism Sunstein advocates:

A major source of objection to a free economy is that it gives people what they want instead of what a particular group thinks they ought to want. Underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself.

SUNSTEIN ENVISIONS "liberalism" as a broad and inclusive political tradition. In fact, he considered titling his book "Big-Tent Liberalism." His conception is so inclusive, it encompasses figures most would deem ideological adversaries. To Sunstein, "James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Angela Merkel all count as part of the liberal tradition."

Endeavoring to create a coalition spanning from Reagan Republicans to Roosevelt Democrats disregards irreconcilable disagreements. Reagan had a deep skepticism of government and a firm belief in the ability

of free markets and civil society to solve societal problems. Roosevelt had the exact opposite conviction, seeing comprehensive government intervention as necessary to address market failures and societal inequities. Reagan liberals favor deregulation and tax reduction. Roosevelt “liberals” champion expansive welfare programs and increased government intercession. These positions do not evolve from a shared framework. They represent incompatible visions of the state’s role in society that no amount of definitional creativity can merge.

To fit his preferred interventionist views into the classical-liberal oeuvre, Sunstein has stretched the concept beyond coherence. If the term “liberalism” embraces both Reagan’s deregulatory agenda and Roosevelt’s New Deal expansion, both Hayek’s spontaneous order and Rawls’s redistributive justice, both support for and opposition to the administrative state, federalism, the free market, and property rights, it ceases to function as a meaningful analytical category. He describes not a political philosophy but an empty receptacle into which any Sunstein-approved policy can be poured.

Sunstein would no doubt disagree, arguing that shared procedural commitments to freedom, pluralism, and the rule of law can unite people across vast substantive disagreements. But he gives the game away in his longest chapter, an unsuccessful attempt to build the case that FDR’s Second Bill of Rights—proposed in his 1944 State of the Union message—is “part of the liberal tradition.”

To make this claim, Sunstein redefines liberty to mean entitlement to adequate income, housing, medical care, education, and protection from financial fears. This recharacterization shifts the government’s role from protecting voluntary exchange and private property rights

to guaranteeing specific outcomes, thus subjugating individual sovereignty to collective welfare.

Struggling to square the circle, Sunstein argues that the Second Bill of Rights was “an attack, liberal in nature, on the whole idea of *laissez-faire*—a suggestion that government and coercion are not opposed to human liberty, but in fact are necessary to it.” But coercion and liberty *are* irreconcilable. They are literal opposites. Classical liberalism necessarily accepts the limited use of state power to defend individual rights from infringement by others. Sunstein’s approach inverts this principle, employing government coercion as an offensive tool to redistribute resources according to his vision of what citizens deserve. This transforms government from a guardian of liberty into a threat.

Sunstein insists with a straight face that “Roosevelt’s emphasis on freedom should be underlined. He was a liberal.” Even Sunstein appears to realize that this claim is a stretch, because he also acknowledges that

America’s public institutions were radically transformed under Roosevelt’s leadership. Under New Deal liberalism, the federal government assumed powers formerly believed to rest with the states. The presidency grew dramatically in stature and importance; it became the principal seat of American democracy. A newly developed bureaucracy, including independent regulatory commissions, was put in place.

Sunstein must recognize that FDR’s expansion of executive authority and the administrative state came at the expense of individual liberty and democratic institutions. A random sampling:

Roosevelt’s imposition of New Deal mandates on businesses and

consumers mirrored the centralized planning of corporatist states. His authoritarian attempt to pack the Supreme Court was designed to undermine judicial independence and validate illiberal rules previously found unconstitutional. His administration’s prosecution of Americans advocating nonintervention during World War II and use of federal agencies to pressure critics constituted a blatant assault on free speech rights. And his interring of Japanese Americans during that war stripped citizens of their most basic freedom.

These policies, which were core rather than ancillary to FDR’s program, cannot remotely be considered liberal, at least not in the classical sense.

PER A 2025 Cato Institute/YouGov survey, a staggering 62 percent of U.S. adults under 30 now hold a “favorable view” of socialism. Over a third look kindly upon Communism. A 2025 Heartland Institute/Rasmussen Reports poll discovered that 76 percent of likely voters under 40 support nationalizing major industries. A majority hopes that a democratic socialist (that’s right, someone from Zohran Mamdani’s party) will become our next president. Meanwhile, the Yale Buckley Institute’s 2025 National Undergraduate Student Survey revealed alarming attitudes toward free speech among American undergraduates: Almost half agree it is sometimes acceptable to shout down speakers, 39 percent consider violence to be justified to silence “hate speech,” and one-third think offensive speech should be criminally prosecuted.

These are not the preferences of a free people. They are the reflexes of ill-informed subjects-in-waiting.

In an era when classical liberalism faces existential threats from both left and right, we need clearer

thinking, not clever redefinitions. A classical-liberal response to our predicament would begin with humility about what government can and should endeavor to accomplish. It would recognize that the primary threat to human flourishing comes not from insufficient expert guidance but from the concentration of power in institutions that lack knowledge, proper incentives, and effective accountability mechanisms.

Such a liberalism would embrace free markets not because they are flawless but because they are more responsive to individual preferences than centralized alternatives. It would shield free speech not because

all speech is valuable but because censorship inevitably empowers the wrong people. It would defend federalism not because states are inherently virtuous but because decentralized decision-making allows for experimentation.

To survive, classical liberalism needs defenders who understand the difference between sincere respect for individual autonomy and paternalistic concern for optimal outcomes. As *On Liberalism* makes clear, the man who wants to “nudge” us all into conduct he thinks best is profoundly ill-suited to defend a tradition built on individual freedom. Indeed, he betrays it. 

civil disagreement, and civics. More recently, Barrett has been explaining the Court’s work on CBS’s *60 Minutes* and Fox News’s *Special Report*, and at conferences hosted by the Free Press, the Dispatch’s SCOTUSblog, and the Reagan Library. She says even more in her new book, *Listening to the Law: Reflections on the Court and Constitution*. “I want people to have trust in the Court,” she told CBS’s Norah O’Donnell, “and that’s why I wrote this book, frankly. I wanted people to understand how the Court works. I wanted them to understand how we get our cases and how we go about making our decisions, because the Court belongs to every American.”

She frames the book in three parts—four, really, when you include the brief autobiographical opening chapter. In the first few pages, she brings readers from her upbringing in New Orleans, where she dreamed of being an author or a teacher, to her education at Notre Dame Law and clerkships for Judge Laurence Silberman and Justice Scalia before her return to Notre Dame Law as a professor. We then read of her appointment to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in 2017, and then to the Supreme Court in late 2020, just days before the presidential election. The introduction also gives glimpses of life at home with husband Jesse—a fellow lawyer and Notre Dame alum, to whom she dedicates the book—and their seven children.

For those who might assume that accepting a Supreme Court nomination is a no-brainer, she describes how much she and Jesse struggled with the notion of leaving behind their home, friends, and community in South Bend for an entirely new life in Washington.

She does not belabor the autobiography, nor does she settle scores. Senator Dianne Feinstein’s hamfisted attack on Barrett’s Catholi-

The Disciple vs. the Master

Listening to the Law: Reflections on the Court and Constitution

By AMY CONEY BARRETT
Sentinel, 336 pages

Reviewed by ADAM J. WHITE

THE YOUNG JUSTICE had much to say. In 1988 and 1989, just a couple of years after President Reagan appointed him to the Supreme Court, Justice Antonin Scalia gave landmark lectures at scattered law schools—then brought the ideas to a slightly bigger audience by publishing them

as essays in various law reviews. At just the moment when constitutional originalism was becoming the ascendant philosophy among conservative judges and lawyers, Justice Scalia’s essays laid the intellectual foundation for the new school of thought. Scalia “made the case for originalism in books, articles, and public appearances,” one of his former clerks observed in 2013. “Even apart from opinions,” she added, “justices particularly passionate about their philosophies take them on the road.”

Now that former clerk is doing it herself. For the past two years, Amy Coney Barrett has gone beyond the courthouse, describing the Court’s work at conferences and in the media. In early 2024, she and Justice Sonia Sotomayor appeared together at two conferences to discuss the importance of collegiality,

ADAM J. WHITE is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and director of the Antonin Scalia Law School’s Center for the Study of the Administrative State.

cism—“the dogma lives loudly within you,” Feinstein notoriously and scandalously declared—gets only an oblique reference, unnamed and unquoted. Instead, Barrett moves quickly to the book’s three main parts: on the Court, on the Constitution, and on how to interpret written laws.

First, she describes the Court’s day-to-day workings. As with her recent public appearances, especially her joint appearances with Sotomayor, there is special emphasis on collegiality. She describes the warm welcomes she received from her colleagues upon joining the Court in 2020. Sotomayor brought bags of Halloween candy for her kids; Justice Brett Kavanaugh, whom she replaced as the junior-most justice, planned a New Orleans-themed welcome dinner. (Two years later, Barrett would plan a *Hamilton*-inspired, Broadway-style welcome dinner for Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson.) Scalia features prominently here, too. “I attack ideas. I don’t attack people,” she quotes him saying. “And some very good people have some very bad ideas. And if you can’t separate the two, you gotta get another day job. You don’t want to be a judge.” Four pages later, the book reproduces a photo of Scalia riding an elephant with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

The point is not simply to offer a feel-good story. Rather, Barrett emphasizes that the Supreme Court’s multimember approach makes disagreement inevitable—and not always for the worse. “Consensus in some cases and respectful division in others can *both* be signs of well-functioning appellate courts,” she emphasizes. And the point goes beyond the judiciary: “The success of a multi-member court rides on the ability to disagree respectfully. The success of a democratic society does too.”

She lays out how the justices take

 The point in *Listening to the Law* is not simply to offer a feel-good story. Rather, Barrett emphasizes that the Supreme Court’s multimember approach makes disagreement inevitable—and not always for the worse.

up cases, make decisions, and work with clerks, while offering us a tactile sense of how she drafts her opinions: “I typically begin with pen and paper because I write faster that way. ... I’m less inclined to be obsessive on a legal pad, and it’s more efficient for me to establish the flow of the argument with a pen before I start typing.”

Listening to the Law concludes with Barrett explaining how actual judges should go about interpreting and applying the actual Constitution and other written laws. We enact written laws because, among other things, “writing enables precision and preservation.” Some of the Constitution’s provisions are clear, precise rules; others are broader, vaguer standards. Obviously, “constitutional standards generate more debate than constitutional rules.”

Barrett recalls how the 22nd Amendment’s two-term limit for

presidents was codified in FDR’s aftermath to make an old norm a permanent, binding rule. One might further note (though she doesn’t) that the lawmakers who passed the 22nd Amendment employed a clear-cut numerical rule rather than a foggy standard—one, say, that would have prohibited presidents from “serving an excessive number of terms in office.” The amendment created the kind of rule that leaves no room for political dispute and no room for judicial doubt, except among the worst kind of nihilists.

But not all parts of the Constitution are so clear-cut, and justices should not make the opposite mistake by reading too *much* precision into provisions that were intentionally left open-ended. “Rigidity and flexibility each have value,” Barrett writes, “and fidelity to the text means that a judge must not try to transform standards into rules or vice versa.”

Some might argue this observation contradicts Scalia’s seminal article, “The Rule of Law as a Law of Rules,” which urges Supreme Court justices to strive to announce clear constitutional rules and not mushy fact-sensitive standards. But that doesn’t get it quite right. Even Scalia himself conceded that “where a particular area is quite susceptible of clear and definite rules, we judges cannot create them out of whole cloth, but must find some basis for them in the text that Congress or the Constitution has provided.” Yet Scalia saw such situations as the exception: “It is rare, however, that even the most vague and general text cannot be given some precise, principled content—and that is indeed the essence of the judicial craft.” Barrett stops short of such confidence.

LISTENING TO THE LAW does seem, in a fundamental sense, to be a conversation between Barrett and her late

mentor. Sometimes she mentions Scalia explicitly, in fond recollections of her time clerking for him, in warm invocations of his judicial example, and in direct reference to his writings. Other times he seems to appear implicitly, when a particular turn of phrase echoes one of Scalia's own famous writings.

For example, in her discussion of judicial restraint, she warns that judicial activism and judges who legislate from the bench will inspire actual legislators in the U.S. Senate to ask pointed policy questions during Supreme Court confirmation hearings as a means of predetermining the outcomes of future case decisions—an approach that further politicizes the Court. Scalia made the same point more colorfully in his *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* dissent when he warned that the Court's creation of abortion rights would only cause Senate confirmation hearings to "deteriorate into question-and-answer sessions in which Senators go through a list of their constituents' most favored and most disfavored alleged constitutional rights, and seek the nominee's commitment to support or oppose them."

Similarly, when Barrett warns that young textualists must take care not to "believe that textualism is context-free literalism" (in a chapter titled "Don't Take It Literally"), she calls to mind Scalia's warning that "the good textualist is not a literalist." Scalia went on to illustrate the point by describing the kinds of "canons and presumptions" that can help to both inform a judge's analysis and constrain his creativity—though of course a choice among multiple canons and presumptions leaves room for judicial mischief, too. Scalia's last book, *Reading Law* (co-written with Bryan Garner), is all about judicial canons of construction and other useful tools for legal interpretation.

Barrett takes up the same subject in *Listening to the Law*, as she should, since her career as a scholar was dedicated to studying the craft of legal interpretation, analyzing various interpretive canons, and probing the relationships between interpreting written laws and applying judicial precedents.

And for precisely that reason, the greatest surprise in *Listening to the Law* is not in what Barrett says, but what she doesn't. She offers only a brief discussion of how judges should grapple with the choice between their own interpretation of a law and the weight of precedents that might interpret the law differently. She could have said much more on this subject; she has before. The younger Barrett wrote landmark articles on stare decisis and the courts and, later, grappled squarely with the practical chal-

lenge of mixing written laws and judicial precedents in academic papers. Maybe Barrett is showing prudence here by going mostly silent on this central matter, given the weight of her responsibilities on the high court. Or maybe we'll read about it in her next book.

The most important difference between Scalia's early speeches and essays and Barrett's recent speeches and book is the audience for whom they are intended. In the late 1980s, Scalia was writing for lawyers and judges just at the point when they needed a deeper understanding of what good judges do. Barrett is making these arguments in a different register for the broader American public—which suggests that her audience is not conservative judges and lawyers, but the large swaths of Americans who distrust them. It is a valuable effort. 🍷

No Country for Young Men

Notes on Being a Man

By SCOTT GALLOWAY
Simon & Schuster, 304 pages

Reviewed by BRIAN STEWART

AFTER Donald Trump's surprise election victory in 2016, Americans of a liberal bent were aghast. One of them was Mark Lilla. A professor at Columbia University, Lilla was gripped by anxiety at the prospect of a postmodern Republican Party taking the White House. But unlike his

BRIAN STEWART is a political writer in New York.

fellow Democrats, he directed his focus inward, toward the wreckage that had been wrought by the progressive movement's rigid "antipolitical dispensation."

In *The Once and Future Liberal*, Lilla identified a particularly egregious example of this phenomenon. The home page of the Republican Party, he noted, was thick with public policies aimed at addressing America's manifold ills and securing its future prosperity. Meanwhile, the home page of the Democratic site had no such manifesto, or anything that gestured toward concrete government action or specific projects for social change. What it displayed instead was a seem-

ingly interminable list of “people” to whom it appealed, a bevy of assorted groups and identities. Lilla counted 17 separate messages tailored to each of these distinct factions and imagined that he had somehow landed on the website of the Lebanese government rather than that of the oldest political organization in the New World.

In a highly readable new book, *Notes on Being a Man*, Scott Galloway makes a similar observation. Only this time, it’s not public policies that are mourned owing to their absence from the Democratic platform. It’s men. Nearly a decade after Lilla’s broadside against identity politics, the Democratic National Committee retains fealty to a cornucopia of constituencies and favored demographic groups along lines of race and gender and sexual orientation. This identitarian craze leaves Galloway scratching his head, not least because it omits some rather important blocs. The DNC’s feast of identity showcases “Who We Serve”—African Americans, the LGBTQ+ community, women, et cetera—but boys and men are nowhere to be found.

This marked indifference toward the male half of the populace has a long pedigree. In 2012, the Obama campaign produced “Julia’s world,” a fictional universe borne out in cartoon illustrations whose protagonist outwardly lacked any qualities of an autonomous citizen. In a series of cartoons tracking the stages of her life, Julia is subsidized and comforted by an omnipotent government—she’s the recipient of college and business loans, birth control, and maternity care. It soon became painfully apparent that, enmeshed in the Leviathan’s embrace, Julia’s world was totally atomized. As Charles Krauthammer observed at the time, it contained “no friends, no community, and, of course, no spouse. Who needs one?”

In Notes on Being a Man, author Scott Galloway doesn't exaggerate when he contends that it has become fashionable to view men as a 'shadowy cabal' upholding a social order that is invidious and oppressive.

She’s married to the provider state.”

Galloway, a professor of marketing at NYU’s Stern School of Business and a serial entrepreneur, plainly resents this smug attitude and hopes to prompt a course correction. He begins in appropriately manly fashion, arguing against one of the reigning progressive nostrums of our era. “There’s no such thing as ‘toxic masculinity,’” he avows. This “emperor of all oxymorons,” Galloway remarks, conflates machismo with masculinity, when in truth “cruelty, criminality, bullying, predation, and abuse of power” are the antithesis of the masculine virtues. In pointed contrast, the role of men, as he defines it, is threefold: protection, provision, and procreation.

What makes this *cri de coeur* remarkable is not so much the argument itself as where it’s coming from. For decades, the cultural elite—of which Galloway is a member in good

standing—has recoiled from notions of masculine virtue and actively suppressed natural male exuberance. The prevailing view in the upper reaches of society is that traditional male proclivities and occupations—from the Boy Scouts to the military—augment emotional repression among young men while diminishing and subduing female pursuits. A therapeutic approach to education venerates feelings while denigrating competition and risk. Galloway doesn’t exaggerate when he contends that it has become fashionable to view men as a “shadowy cabal” upholding a social order that is invidious and oppressive.

The popular conception of an entrenched patriarchy has given rise to open hostility for traditionally male sensibilities, which has in turn generated a crude backlash from a significant number of men (and some women). A procession of “men’s rights advocates” on social media speaks to challenges faced by young men and castigates the wretchedness of an effete culture that has no place for them. Rather than articulating a program of moral and material improvement for young men, however, these uncouth and often squalid figures promote a will to power that is indistinguishable from egotism. Instead of tempering and channeling boys’ unruly and aggressive tendencies toward constructive purposes, the tribunes of machismo preach male superiority and sully the covenant that used to exist between the sexes. It seems safe to surmise that when healthy expressions of masculinity are not tolerated, malicious forms take root.

In this fraught landscape, Galloway is a welcome and largely reliable guide. For starters, he is no kind of reactionary. Unlike the male chauvinists who mistake any hint of civility and gentlemanly conduct for weakness, Galloway is secure enough to defend both phy-

sicality and kindness, strength and restraint, in the same breath. In contrast to much of the “manosphere,” he cheers the progress of modernity that systematically dismantled the economic structures and social taboos that suppressed women’s liberty and kept them dependent on men.

Nonetheless, Galloway is sensible enough to recognize that, amid historic social upheaval and feminine uplift, our character-forming institutions have generally lost sight of a crucial question: What happens to boys and men when their proper function has become ambiguous? What happens when there is no moral direction or sense of high purpose imbued into them? At a time when boys are languishing academically and socially, Galloway does not mask the ominous trajectory of this widespread neglect: “There is nothing more dangerous,” he writes, “than a lonely, broke young man.”

WITH DUE modesty, Galloway sketches a rough outline, not an instruction manual, about how to be “a responsible human flooded with testosterone.” This includes a grateful, and refreshingly bold, acknowledgment of male sex characteristics, which he lists as dominance, ambition, competition, confidence, skill, risk-taking—“anything that can help a man beat back competitors and attract a mate’s attention.” Instead of disparaging testosterone, let alone proposing to stifle it, he lauds the engine of masculinity for “winning wars and World Series.” When properly harnessed, it is a tremendous asset for civilization, and Galloway doesn’t shy away from saying so.

Notes on Being a Man is mostly a memoir of its author’s travails growing up in Southern California in the late 1960s and 1970s, the only

 At a time when boys are languishing academically and socially, Galloway does not mask the ominous trajectory of this neglect: “There is nothing more dangerous,” he writes, “than a lonely, broke young man.”

son of a cash-strapped immigrant single mother. But it is meant to serve as a kind of self-help guide for young men who are alone and adrift, imploring them to spend as much time playing sports as watching them, to cultivate a strong work ethic, and to take up yoga in search of a mate. Galloway has become famous in certain quarters for dispensing countercultural advice—“don’t follow your passion” being a crowd favorite—and he recycles his greatest hits in his new book. Think Jordan Peterson for strivers and would-be entrepreneurs.

Galloway writes with a combination of effortlessness and grit, which makes for flashes of real humor and some penetrating cultural insights. However, the book is carried along by an endless series of vignettes, and this gives it a disjointed style that can at times make for hard sledding. There is also a fair amount

of repetition—this reviewer lost count of how many times the author referred to himself, tediously, as a “straight white man.”

In the main, though, the book marshals compelling evidence on behalf of a worthwhile thesis: Boys and men are in crisis and in need of urgent help. Leaning heavily on research by the Brookings Institute scholar Richard Reeves, Galloway draws attention to a disturbing reality: Men are falling behind women across a range of measures, from college enrollment to employment rates to general life satisfaction. The decline in educational attainment and remunerative employment, along with a prohibitive real estate market, has cast legions of young men into a downward spiral of “social isolation, boredom, and ignorance.”

The statistics paint a grim picture. Sixty percent of men between the ages of 18 and 24 live with their parents, and, at age 30, 1 in 5 still live with their parents. What Galloway does not fully illuminate is how young men’s struggles in school and the marketplace have produced growing alienation between the sexes, especially when ancient gender ideals still hold sway. About 60 percent of Americans under the age of 35 live without a spouse or partner. Readers may be shocked to discover that, for the first time in more than a century, people under 35 are more likely to live with a parent than with a partner. The prospects don’t brighten appreciably with age. Almost one-third of middle-aged Americans, those who are 35 to 54, live without a partner.

This social bifurcation is rife with political implications, as American men and women vote more and more differently. (Even when they vote the same, it can be for diametrically opposed reasons.) The Republican Party has historically addressed the cultural grievances of

American men, and this trend has grown much more pronounced in the age of Trump. In 2019, men were 13 points more likely to approve of President Trump than women—the largest presidential gender gap ever recorded. By 2024, between young men and women, the gap was 16 points—the biggest pivot from Democrats to Republicans of any age cohort. An election that was “supposed” to be a referendum on women’s rights, Galloway laments, was driven by “failing young men.” This can only propel a vicious cycle whereby tenacious male alienation aggravates the political polarization of the sexes, and the resulting frustration and incomprehension drive them still further apart.

ONE COMPONENT of a solution to the current plight of boys and young men is to lower the room temperature by evolving a view of the world beyond the Manichean struggle between Mars and Venus. Just as it was wrong to treat girls and women as “the other sex” for generations, reversing this formula at the expense of boys and men involves an equal injustice. We’d be better off heeding what Saul Bellow called “the universal eligibility to be noble” and granting each sex the space to flourish in accordance with its nature. This will require substituting the overriding concern in civil society to guard self-esteem with a more tough-minded emphasis on self-respect.

It’s clear that, in pursuit of a radical egalitarian ideal, America’s distinctly non-virile educational system punishes boys for the circumstance of being boys. In our schools, boys are regularly treated as if they were interchangeable with girls. Galloway impishly remarks that in some ways, boys are more akin to energetic dogs: If they aren’t worn out, they will cause trouble. Great

 The more men feel that no good deed goes unpunished, the more they will logically conclude that genuine courage and compassion are not worth the risk. Thus, they will abdicate their erstwhile role and responsibilities.

efforts have been made to curb natural male tendencies and sensibilities. (To pluck a suggestive example, the old game of “tug-of-war,” where not banned outright, is now commonly rechristened “tug-of-peace” on playgrounds across America.) The problem doesn’t end after school lets out, given that an influential gender-equity movement regarding masculinity as inherently predatory animates much of the public square.

So long as American society does not bring itself to acknowledge that boys and girls are different—equal, but not the same—large numbers of each will continue to struggle in vain. It has long been suggested that recognizing important sex differences is liable to foster sexism and stereotypes. But it behooves us to consider the high price of continuing to indulge a Rousseauian romanticism that shames

and thwarts the characteristic sensibilities of boys and men. If what the ancient Greeks called *thumos*—spiritedness—is stigmatized in male behavior, the other lifestyles beckoning young men may be much less agreeable, not least for women.

Since public esteem is no longer widely conferred on acts of gallantry and manly assertiveness, there is little incentive for men to make themselves worthy of such esteem. The more that men feel that no good deed goes unpunished, the more they will logically conclude that genuine courage and compassion are not worth the risk. Thus, they will abdicate their erstwhile role and responsibilities. By contrast, men who abjure risk and keep a low profile are disposed to reap lavish rewards.

Where have the good men gone? By and large, they have been rudely cast out of polite society. Those remaining are left with an unenviable choice between, on the one hand, a shrinking mediocrity that may at least offer the prospect of decent compensation and, on the other, a prolonged adolescence filled with trivial pursuits—from video games to drug use—to distract them from the cruelties of fate.

Unfortunately, Galloway does not really spell out this perverse incentive system, which is bizarre given how obvious and destructive it has become and since it furnishes irrefutable evidence for his case. Though his personal goodwill and sharp eye are equally manifest throughout this book, his limits as a social and political analyst are, in the end, no less apparent.

Despite these blemishes, Galloway deserves immense credit for fleshing out the broad contours of “an aspirational vision of masculinity.” To overlook that achievement would be—if you’ll forgive the expression—unmanly. 🐾

We have tee shirts.
We have tote bags. We have sweatshirts.

AT LAST!
THE
Commentary
Magazine
STORE

GO TO <https://3baa0d.myshopify.com>

Great gifts for the Commentary reader
or Commentary podcast listener
in your life.



HOLLYWOOD COMMENTARY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64 lot of money that they were. But we're at a curious time in the television business, where there is still a lot of money, and therefore a lot of leverage, in the old business model involving broadcast network affiliates. Two of the biggest station groups, Sinclair and Nexstar, own a lot of ABC affiliate stations. The O&O's tend to be in the big cities. The affiliates tend to be in smaller, more rural areas, which means the familiar red-state/blue-state divisions apply here. Sinclair and Nexstar viewers didn't like Kimmel's remarks—they didn't like him much before that, either, nor did the Trump administration. And because the Federal Communications Commission has leverage over broadcast station groups (especially during a time of mergers and consolidations), and because affiliate station groups *still* have leverage over their broadcast network partners, the squeeze went all the way up the chain. And Jimmy Kimmel was in trouble.

The irony here is that a lot of the outraged responses to the pressure on Jimmy Kimmel came from people who do not actually *watch* Jimmy Kimmel. His show—like his late-night competitors on other networks—does get a lot of attention and views from clips that float around social media platforms. A lot of people, in other words, “watch” old-timey broadcast television in the most modern way there is—on their phones, while scrolling through TikTok. A further irony is that many people subscribe to social media accounts *specifically* because those accounts search and serve up outrageous remarks made on other platforms. The Jimmy Kimmel Affair was a kaleidoscope of time-bending components—old-line broadcasting, on-line audiences, with the new economics of Hollywood meeting the old salaries of yesteryear.

And the real reason this anachronistic, late-20th-century leverage worked at all is because Kimmel—and his colleagues at the other big networks, Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Fallon—are still *paid* like it's the old days. They each earn, roughly, about \$15 million a year. Those shows cost, on average, about \$120 million per year to produce. Don't ask me why it's so much. No one really knows. But with budgets this high, no network can afford to take a show off its broadcast schedule. No network can really afford to tell Sinclair and Nexstar to buzz off.

This is back-of-the-envelope, very rough math, but

when you calculate that only about 5.4 million viewers form the combined audience for the Big Three network 11:30 talk shows, and they cost about \$360 million to produce, you can start to see why Jimmy Kimmel seems a little like General Jean-François André Sordet, commander of the French cavalry corps, riding into battle like some relic from another time. Everyone else on the battlefield of show business is gutting their way through brutal cutbacks, production collapses, with profit margins and business models hacked and sliced to pieces by the relentless modernity of unlimited bandwidth and streaming-service economics. But for some reason, there are still three grandees in fuzzy hats riding into the battlefield like it's still 1995.

I was working on a show years ago, and one of the episodes turned out...well, let's just say it wasn't one of our best, and so we were faced with a decision: When should we air it?

Do it in December, an executive told us, *sometime Christmas week. Low HUT levels*, he said—HUT, by the way, is a heartbreakingly anachronistic anagram for Households Using Television, back when we said that households were “using” television instead of streaming content, back when families watched the same show on the same television set, back when we were all in the show-business cavalry, marching proudly in our uniforms.

Let's bury it in December, he said. *We've got to put something on then, may as well be this episode.*

Oh well!, we thought. *Those low HUT levels are a godsend!* And it never occurred to us, or anyone, that “low HUT levels” would soon be permanent. In the intervening years, of course, it's been made clear to everyone. Well, everyone but Kimmel, Colbert, and the other guy.

There is no particular reason, by the way, that a late-night talk show can't be reasonably popular and economically successful. It's an audience-appealing category, and that hasn't changed. But at \$120 million a throw, that's simply not going to happen. And as long as late-night talk shows—and a lot of other corners of the entertainment business—are produced with budgets of the glorious past, the merciless economics of the present are going to continue to deliver expensive and brutal lessons. Lessons to them—and the horse they rode in on. 🐾



HOLLYWOOD COMMENTARY

Jimmy Kimmel, the Old War Horse

ROB LONG

WORLD WAR I began in the summer of 1914 with the thunder of galloping horses, and yes, I promise this column will be about show business. Along the Western Front, the forces of France, Germany, and Britain included more than 200 cavalry regiments, each with its own retinue of veterinarians, saddlers, farriers, and stable hands. Cavalry was a gloriously impractical way to fight a modern war, and within weeks, those notions of 19th-century military glamor met the devastating rifle, machine-gun, and artillery killing machines of the 20th century.

Again: I swear to you that this is about Hollywood.

By the autumn of 1914, trench warfare set in and mechanized firepower dominated, and it was clear that the glory days of the noble warrior steed had passed. The tactics and traditions of sabers and men in fuzzy hats proved painfully anachronistic amid the relentless modern slaughter. The bloody battlefields of Audregnies and Frontiers, especially, were charnel houses of horses and horsemen alike, with the corpses of both lying in an unholy and grotesque tangle.

And that brings us to Jimmy Kimmel.

See? I told you it was about show business.

When Jimmy Kimmel was removed from the ABC broadcast network airwaves a few weeks ago, and

then returned after a tense weekend of White House insults, online squabbling, and behind-the-scenes corporate intrigue, it was clear that late-night television talk shows—the proud and profitable tradition embodied by the great Johnny Carson—were about as relevant and sustainable as a cavalry charge on the fields of 1914 France.

We all know the basic story: Kimmel made a set of callous and (to some) unfeeling remarks that touched on the assassination of political activist and conservative hero Charlie Kirk, which were then clipped and distributed—and this is a crucial detail—online, so that a lot of people who do not watch Jimmy Kimmel could watch those segments and become outraged. The angry responses came from the usual contemporary places, like Fox News and X, but they also came from a very old-fashioned, nearly forgotten quarter.

The ABC network is still a network—a collection of actual, steel-and-glass TV stations strung across the country that broadcasts its signals through coaxial cable and sometimes even through the air. Yes, still! Some of the stations belong to ABC. Those are known as “owned and operated”—the *O&O*’s. But most of them are independent stations that have signed deals with the network. Those are the *affiliates*.

Most of the verbs in the paragraph above should be in the past tense, or, at least, before the Kimmel Affair, I would have bet a **CONTINUED ON PAGE 63**

ROB LONG *has been the executive producer of seven TV series.*

WHAT IF

**you could make a better
future for Israel?**

You can.

Invest in Israel's future with a charitable gift annuity, bequest, or other planned gift to the American Technion Society. **Don't miss the highest annuity rate in 15 years!**

Leave a legacy that drives Israel's innovation economy by supporting the country's brightest minds to solve global challenges, cure diseases, and develop the technologies that keep Israel safe.

Stand with Israel. Stand with the Technion.



AMERICAN
TECHNION
SOCIETY

**World-changing discoveries
By Israel's brightest minds
Made possible by you**

ats.plannedgiving.org

Judy Sager • Executive Director, Planned Giving • judy@ats.org • 781.531.0441

The Education America Needs

If we want to save American democracy, we have to educate for it.

St. John's College was founded in a time of civilizational peril. As fascism spread across Europe, a small group of American educators launched the "New Program" in 1937: an education rooted in the great texts of the West and committed to cultivating reason, virtue, and citizenship.

That mission has never been more urgent.

Today, students at St. John's read founding texts not to revere them blindly, but to understand the civilization they've inherited—and the responsibilities it confers. They read Aristotle on ethics, Maimonides on law, Locke on liberty, and Douglass on freedom alongside history's greatest scientific and mathematical minds from Euclid to Einstein. They learn to speak across difference, to think with clarity, and to seek the truth, not applause.

This is not education as indoctrination. It's education as liberation.

Jewish families seeking an intellectually singular, morally serious, and nonpartisan environment will find St. John's to be one of the last sanctuaries of liberal learning—and one of the first places preparing the nation's next generation of leaders for what comes next.



ST JOHN'S
College

ANNAPOLIS • SANTA FE



sjc.edu

For the Republic—and the Individual.

Our all-required Great Books curriculum is equivalent to a double major in philosophy and the history of mathematics and science, and a double minor in comparative literature and classical studies. Our alumni excel as lawyers, diplomats, theologians, judges, writers, scholars, doctors, scientists, ethicists, educators, and more.

