

# Israel's Tragedy, America's Folly

Eleven columns by Jim Sleeper

The first eight of these columns, written from January 4 to April 1, 2009 in response to Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza, trace the arc of a thought-process about the State of Israel's posture in the Middle East over the past 40 years and explore some ways to unbend that posture in order to rescue what's still promising. Many others have come to hold similar views, but without articulating them in the ways I try to do here.

Below these columns are two more, about American neo-conservatives who've driven the miscarriage of American public thinking and policy under George W. Bush. You don't have to click anything else to read the texts of most of these columns. Although they're summarized immediately right here below this paragraph, their full texts are also here on this screen, starting below the summary. But to read articles or sources that are linked in the text, click on the column titles and read them in their original postings at TPM or OpenDemocracy.

## Israel's Tragedy

The full texts of these columns are right here on this screen, but to read a column's links to other work you may have to click the column's title and read it as the original TPM post.

The first column, ["Can There Be Politics in Tragedy?"](#), confronts Israeli policy toward Gaza over the past 40 years through the eyes of a young but formidably well-informed American who has worked in Gaza. Finding his account revelatory yet incomplete in its understanding of Israel, I pose questions about the history and intentions of both sides.

The second, ["How Dysfunctional Is Israel?"](#) probes the dominant Israeli mindset in the war – and a dominant but untrustworthy mindset in some of its critics.

The third, ["Gaza Needs a George Orwell Now,"](#) warns Israel's critics against a too credulous or one-sided reading of reports from Gaza. Hideous though Israel's destruction has been I note that while Franco the fascist was the great villain of the Spanish Civil War, Orwell found evil, as well, in the supposedly heroic Stalinist resistance. He also found that no one wanted to know. This short column prompted a 20 minute NPR interview that is also linked below,

The fourth, ["How and How Not to Assess Israel's Moral Self-Destruction,"](#) carries the search for full reportage (and sound premises) into a critique of Gaza reporting by Chris Hedges (a moralistic critic of Israel) and Jeffrey Goldberg (a neo-conservative apologist for the war.) Instead I endorse the thinking of Avraham Burg and Jonathan Schell. A follow-up column -- ["Truth-digging Requires Full Reports, Not Sermons,"](#) is here.

The fifth, ["U.K., U.S., Drop Their \(and Israel's\) Grand Strategy,"](#) written shortly before Obama's inauguration, summons an observation about Zionism by Hannah Arendt as my endorsement of recent comments by the British Foreign Secretary about the inutility of the "war on terror."

The sixth, ["Israel's Only Way Out,"](#) written shortly before the Feb. 10 elections, draws together these themes, criticizing Michael Walzer's apologetics for the war and proposing a new way of thinking about Israel and wars of this kind.

The seventh, ["A Quiet Read in a Dark Time,"](#) flags an unlikely but revelatory exploration of "coercive non-violence" as a viable strategy for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The eighth, ["Coercive Non-Violence Isn't What You May Think,"](#) rebuts disdainful misunderstandings of it as "pacifist" or "passive." It is anything but, requiring more disciplined courage and energy than armies do.

A ninth column, ["Three Advantages to the Cairo Speech,"](#) notes Obama's comments of June, 2009 on the importance of coercive-nonviolence in the Israel-Palestine conflict and of his flushing out ideologues in both the "armed struggle" left and the "This land is our land" right.

## **American Neo-cons' Folly**

["The Pity of It All,"](#) about young American Jewish writers who've gone wrong, ran in TPM Cafe. And openDemocracy.net posted ["U.S. Neo-cons Jump Conservative Ship,"](#) about their ideological confusion, as expressed in essays such as Sam Tanenhaus' "Conservatism Is Dead."

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## **I. Israel's Tragedy**

[Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)  
[Can There Be Politics in Tragedy? Or in Gaza?](#)

By Jim Sleeper - January 4, 2009, 6:22PM

I'm immersed in long-range writing and leave tomorrow for six months in Berlin, but the Gaza war provokes me to share a brilliant essay by Darryl Li, a doctoral student in anthropology and Middle East Studies at Harvard and a student at Yale Law School who has worked in Gaza for Human Rights Watch, B'tselem (the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights.

The essay appeared last February in Middle East Report, but it's making the rounds again because its clarity and comprehensiveness outweigh its blind spots. Below I post half of it with my comments, but click the link and read it all.

Li writes that Israel's promises to avoid a "humanitarian crisis" reflect its long descent from treating Gaza as a Bantustan to abandoning yet controlling it as a holding pen. He gets polemical at times, and some of his analysis is wrong. But he's right that Israel's "disengagement" from Gaza in 2005 is, not "a one-time abandonment of control" but "an ongoing process of controlled abandonment, by which Israel is severing the ties forged with Gaza over 40 years... without allowing any viable alternatives to emerge." This strategy seeks "neither justice nor even stability, but rather survival -- as we are reminded by every guarantee that an undefined 'humanitarian crisis' will be avoided."

A chilling charge. Li doesn't mention Israel's donation of greenhouses and housing it left behind in 2005, but he notes coldly that "Since its beginnings over a century ago, the Zionist project of creating a state for the Jewish people in the eastern Mediterranean has faced an intractable challenge: how to deal with indigenous non-Jews -- who today comprise half of the population living under Israeli rule -- when practical realities dictate that [Palestinians] cannot be removed and ideology demands that they must not be granted political equality."

This produced, he says, "the general contours of Israeli policy from left to right over the generations...: First, maximize the number of Arabs on the minimal amount of land, and second, maximize control over the Arabs while minimizing any apparent responsibility for them.

"On the first score, Gaza is a resounding success: Although it covers only 1.5 percent of the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, it warehouses one out of every four Palestinians living in the entire country. But on the second count, Gaza's density has made it very difficult to manage and its poverty makes it an eyesore before the world community." That has "forced Israel to revise its balance of responsibility and control several times. Each phase of this ongoing experiment can be understood through spatial metaphors of increasingly constricted scope: bantustan, internment camp, animal pen."

Yes, I know. But keep reading.

"From 1967 to the first intifada of 1987-1993, Israel used its military rule to incorporate Gaza's economy and infrastructure forcibly into its own, while treating the Palestinian population as a reserve of cheap migrant workers. It was during this stage of labor migration and territorial segregation that Gaza came closest to resembling the South African 'bantustans' -- the nominally independent black statelets set up by the apartheid regime to evade responsibility for the indigenous population whose labor it was exploiting.

"During the Oslo phase of the occupation (1993-2005), Israel delegated some administrative functions to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and welcomed migrant workers from Asia and Eastern Europe to replace the Gazans. ... Permits for travel to Israel and the West Bank, once commonly granted, became rare. Ordinary vehicular traffic ceased..... Israel erected a fence around the territory and commenced channeling non-Israeli people and goods through a handful of newly built permanent terminals like the ones that have recently come to the West Bank.

"It was during this period that Gaza under Israeli management most resembled a giant internment camp. The detainee population was, to a certain extent, self-organized and appointed representatives to act on its behalf (the PA) who nevertheless operated under the aegis of supreme Israeli military authority, within the framework of agreements concluded by Israel and a largely defunct Palestine Liberation Organization (which are now basically agreements between Israel and itself).

"The failure of the settlement enterprise and the ferocity of the armed resistance during the second intifada beginning in the fall of 2000 undoubtedly contributed to the decision to remove settlements and withdraw soldiers." But "[D]isengagement did not change Israel's effective control over Gaza and hence its responsibility as an occupying power under international humanitarian law.... Israel continued to patrol Gaza's airspace and seacoast, and ground troops operated, built fortifications and enforced buffer zones inside the Strip.... The taxation system, currency and trade remained in Israel's hands; water, power and communications infrastructure continued to depend on Israel; and even the population registry was still kept by Israeli authorities.

"Israel's response has been simple, if disingenuous: If responsibility for Gaza arises from Gaza's dependency on Israel, then it would be more than happy to cut those ties once and for all. And this is exactly what Israel started doing after Fatah's military defeat in Gaza at the hands of Hamas in June 2007.... In any event, in Gaza the Oslo experiment in indirect rule seems to be over. Israel now treats the territory less like an internment camp and more like an animal pen: a space of near total confinement whose wardens are concerned primarily with keeping those inside alive and tame, with some degree of mild concern as to the opinions of neighbors and other outsiders."

This is Li at his most polemical but also at his most factual: Read the complete essay to see his account of how the border crossings are run and what the consequences are.

Then he writes, "[T]he logic of 'essential humanitarianism....' promises nothing more than turning Gazans one and all into beggars -- or rather, into well-fed animals -- dependent on international money and Israeli fiat. It allows Israel to keep Palestinians and the international community in perpetual fear of an entirely manufactured "humanitarian crisis" that Israel can induce at the flip of a switch (due to the embargo, Gaza's power plant only has enough fuel at any one time to operate for two days. And it distracts from, and even legitimizes, the destruction of Gaza's own economy, institutions and infrastructure.... The notion of 'essential humanitarianism' reduces the needs, aspirations and rights of 1.4 million human beings to an exercise in counting calories, megawatts and other abstract, one-dimensional units measuring distance from death.

"As Israel has experimented with various models for controlling Gaza over the decades, the fundamental refusal of political equality... has taken on different names.... During the Bantustan period, inequality was called coexistence; during the Oslo period, separation; and during disengagement, it is reframed as avoiding "humanitarian crises," or survival. These slogans were not outright lies, but they disregarded the unwelcome truth that coexistence is not freedom, separation is not independence and survival is not living."

Li argues that although "half of the people between the Mediterranean and the Jordan live under a state that excludes them from the community of political subjects, denies them true equality and thus discriminates against them in varying domains of rights, Israel has impressively managed to keep this half of the population divided against itself -- as well as against foreign workers and non-Ashkenazi Jews -- through careful distribution of differential privileges and punishments and may continue to do so for the foreseeable future."

Li concludes with a telling but "tacit reminder of the intimacy that persists through 40 years of domination. The people of the southern Israeli town of Sderot... were unpleasantly reminded of this intimacy when, one morning in 2005, they awoke to find hundreds of leaflets on their streets warning them in Arabic to leave their homes before they were attacked. The Israeli military had airdropped the fliers over neighboring parts of the northern Gaza Strip in an attempt to intimidate the Palestinians there, but strong winds blew them over the frontier instead."

Three things are rather obviously missing from Li's clear, cool assessment: The pre-1967 history of Israelis and Palestinians; the post-2009 future Li wants for the area; and the existence of Hamas, which, we are left to assume, is what it is because Israel's policies have been what they've been.

Well, Li can't cover everything in a 2800-word essay (and, if you've read this far, please do read all of what he wrote). But some contextual markers from him in these three areas would have advanced the discussion and perhaps his arguments. On the three areas I've mentioned, let me just note here that:

1. Li mentions Jewish history only with the words, "Since its beginnings over a century ago, the Zionist project of creating a state for the Jewish people in the eastern Mediterranean...." Correct, but, shall we say, minimalist, with a soupcon of a suggestion that they don't belong there. Perhaps Ashkenazi Jews who came to Palestine of the 1920s and '30s should have returned to the warm and welcoming bosom of Europe? Some of my Lithuanian-Jewish ancestors actually knew the geography of Palestine far better than they knew that of the Baltic provinces they finally fled.

Why was that? Does Li know why Immanuel Kant dismissed the Jews of his time as "These Palestinians who are living among us."? (On that, for the philosophically as well as historically inclined, I commend the Israeli philosopher Yirmiyahu Yovel's *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews.*) Does Li know that 40% of Israel's Jews grew up speaking Arabic, or hearing their parents speak it, because after Israel's founding they became refugees from centuries-old homes in Algiers and Cairo and Baghdad?

2. If it is correct to reduce the Jewish historical context to a few words, as Li did in his essay, wouldn't it have been just as correct to note that Palestinian demands for liberal rights and for self-determination in a nation-state arose only as the Zionist demands did? Were there any such Palestinian demands under Ottoman rule?

Doesn't Palestinian liberalism come from the 20th-century West, if not, indeed, from the Jews? Isn't that what makes this such a tragedy? If not, would Li tell us which Arab state wants a Palestinian state to exist even now?

True, the answers are more complicated than my questions imply, for most nations in the Middle East are post-colonial fictions, and that opens a door to a long and, for the left, a fraught debate about whether there should be nation-states at all, and, if not, what "national liberation movements" are for. Li quite rightly poses the broader, more urgent problem of political equality for Palestinians, both as individuals and as a community. Israel speaks with a forked tongue on the subject, and Li is justified and effective in spotlighting the "right" fork.

But what solution does he seek? What kind of Israeli responsibility, or Israeli-Palestinian interdependency, does he envision? This matters if we really want to end Israel's depredations in the occupied territories and, to a lesser but very real extent, among its own 1.5-million Arab citizens within the 1967 borders. Does Li seek Israel's dissolution in a bi-national, democratic state whose majority would be Palestinian? So I infer, but can he say with a straight face that, under Arab rule, justice would finally displace revenge, as it has not under Israeli occupation?

Li knows that Israelis, who've actually worked rather hard and suffered to build their hybrid Jewish/democratic state, insist they see no signs of any similar inclination among Palestinians. To what extent are they right when they say that? To what extent are they just racist? To what extent are they rationalizing their cruel, bone-headed obsession with their own security at the expense of everyone else's?

3. To sort out this question about Israeli perceptions -- and it always helps to read the scorching reportage and columns in Haaretz, Israel's New York Times, but with much more integrity than the Times -- we'd have to open a door to the third black hole in Li's essay: Hamas.

Suffice it to say here that, revolted though I am by young American-Jewish fanatics who move to Judea and Samaria because they think God promised it to them, I am no less weary of watching young American writers displace a cold, fine-spun rage at suburban America, however well-justified that rage may be, onto Israel as an implantation of that way of life into the Muslim ummah.

Somehow they never get around to imagining how the human rights and personal freedoms they champion would fare under Hamas or Hezbollah, even just for Muslims, even if every Jew returned to that warm and welcoming bosom of Europe.

Somehow, Hamas' apologists never get around to telling us whether the fence Israel put up around Gaza can possibly have had anything to do with the seemingly endless number of suicide bombings in Israel that Hamas supported, or whether they think the suicide bombings were justified by Israel's oppressive rule in Gaza.

This is a tragedy in every sense, and Israel's latest attempt to escape it is doomed, no matter the military outcome. Li is right to challenge Americans, and perhaps especially Jews, to take off the blinkers and see what Israel has been doing. But if he thinks that Israel can dissolve itself, or be dissolved by others, into a greater liberalism or humanism that he and a few noble advocates want to herald in the Middle East, let him sketch out for us how that might happen.

Let him tell Israel and its enemies how to climb back up the ladder from animal pen to internment camp to Bantustan, to....? It's not as if Hamas and Hezbollah, just because they have been providing social services and a certain kind of schooling, are showing us liberals the way. There are other ways, described best in Johnathan Schell's *The Unconquerable World*, which acknowledges, however, that for every movement led by a Gandhi, King, Mandela, Havel, or Michnick, there are peoples' liberation movements as destructive and as doomed as their oppressors. Li sidesteps that question. Sooner or later, he will have to answer for that omission.

[Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)  
[How Dysfunctional is Israel?](#)

By Jim Sleeper - January 9, 2009, 5:52PM

One night in the 1960s, drunken teenagers in Palmer, Massachusetts decided to spook kids at a Jewish, Hebrew-speaking summer camp. They hurled bottles and catcalls, terrifying 12-year olds in their beds. Two Israeli camp counselors raced into the woods like raging bulls, intending to give the townies more than an escort to the local cops. They didn't catch them, but they set up martial patrols, scaring the campers as much as the rowdies, who never returned.

I am not telling this story to be comical or exculpatory at a time when the UN and the Red Cross have reinforced Darryl Li's claim, presented here on Jan. 4, that Israel has turned Gaza from a Bantustan into an internment camp and worse. I am telling it to offer a glimpse into a part of the Israeli psyche, a mindset that antedates the rockets of today and of 2006, the suicide bombings of 2002 and even the war around Israel's founding in 1948.

It's a mind set that often misjudges its circumstances and responds dysfunctionally: In 1995, the Israeli law student Yigal Amir said that he'd assassinated Yitzhak Rabin because Rabin would "give our country to the Arabs" and "we need to be cold-hearted." In 1994, Baruch Goldstein, a Jew from Brooklyn, massacred 29 Palestinians at prayer, prompting me to take a stand that was also a confession. (Called, "Massacre in Israel Forces a Hard Look Inward," it's the fourth and last item on the pdf.)

We all know where this mindset comes from. If we're honest, we also know that there's a dysfunctional mindset among Arabs that antedates Israel's outrages: (It wasn't Israel, for example, that blocked a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza from 1948 to 1967.)

Each side now thinks that it's a Warsaw Ghetto resisting the Nazis - Palestinians against a racist, expansionist horde of real-estate speculators and militarists, Israelis against a raging sea of 100 million Arabs whose demagogues act as if .01 percent of the Middle East can't be home to a people Immanuel Kant tellingly called "these Palestinians who are living among us," thereby tapping swift, dark undercurrents that would soon surface across Europe.

Each side is right enough about the history to be impervious to the other's moralizing and emoting, especially when the moralizers shrug or keep silent about 1948-1967, or about certain massacres, and suicide bombers or aerial bombings. M.J. Rosenberg reminds us of George Orwell's observation that "All nationalists [and their apologists, I would add] have the power of not seeing resemblances between similar sets of facts.... Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage -- torture, the use of hostages, forced labour, mass deportations, imprisonment without trial, ... assassination, the bombing of civilians -- which does not change its moral colour when it is committed by 'our' side ... The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them."

Even some who acknowledge their own side's excesses consider them justified in the excruciating balance of history and necessity. So say apologists for the desperation behind the suicide bombings and rockets that have hit Israel. And so say apologists for Israel's responses with walls and policies that have turned Gaza, especially, into an internment camp. But Orwell's comment reminds us that selective moralism can prove as dysfunctional and destructive as the atrocities it ignores or tries to excuse.

Pondering this ancient and awful habit, I can't help thinking of certain high-born WASP and Jewish writers of the 1930s and 1940s, so guilt-ridden or enraged about the American bourgeois duplicity in their own upbringings that they couldn't see through Stalin, even as millions writhed in his prisons and graves. The self-proclaimed enemy of their own despised pasts had become their friend. Orwell had to contend with such

myopia in 1944, when his *Animal Farm* couldn't find a British publisher because the politically correct, parlour left couldn't tolerate even his veiled send-up of the USSR.

Similarly, some new leftists of the 1960s -- bred in at least modest comfort, as the Port Huron Statement famously noted, and somewhat guilt-ridden about it -- considered the dysfunctional Black Panthers and some of the worst Third World demagogues to be noble because they gave good rhetoric and some social services. But it wasn't only the left: Many conservative Britons and Americans cottoned to Hitler and Mussolini before 1939; others later became apologists and enablers of Chile's Pinochet or the Argentine junta, or of Ahmed Chalabi and worse.

Years ago I examined such delusional apologists for oppression on both right and left, while reviewing Paul Hollander's neo-connish but smartly aimed *Political Pilgrims*. I commend this review to anyone whose fine-spun rage at their American and/or Jewish pasts has driven them to seek deliverance either in Jewish nationalism and hatred of Arabs in the blinding clarity of the Judaeen desert, or in the loathsome submission for which Allah's enforcers Hassan Nasrallah, Khaled Mashaal, Ismail Haniyah, and Mahmoud Zahar are preparing both Shiites and Palestinians, all the more so if Israel disappears.

Let me explore, in this and the next few paragraphs, a few reasons why the leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas do get a rather generous pass from critics of Israel who have long found the Jews a remarkably attractive dumping ground for their displaced self-loathing. Then I'll get back to Israel's dysfunction.

From New Zealand and Australia to South Africa and Canada and the U.S, not to mention London, excoriating the Jews seems an almost genetic compulsion in an annoyingly large proportion of English-speaking whites whose forebears and leaders seized other people's lands and slaughtered and enslaved the peoples themselves - - not because the Brits were seeking refuge from annihilation at home but because they were as rapacious then as they are hypocritical now.

I once stopped an Australian who was ranting on and on about the Israelis by telling him, "I agree with you completely that all whites should leave Australia" -- something he had not said -- "for doing what you say the Israelis have done, except for the fact that some of you came to Australia in chains when the British first began appropriating it for a penal colony." In the recent movie "Australia," that country indulges in a grand, lachrymose reminiscence about its safely dead or subdued Aborigines, much as Americans waxed poetic about their Indians a few decades after their final submission. Mightn't what Israel is doing remind them rather too closely for comfort of something they actually did far more brutally and completely and were never condemned or corrected for doing?

I once confronted a genteel New England WASP who called Palestinian suicide bombers "incredibly brave martyrs" -- and who owns a colonial home on the banks of Connecticut River, which his forebears swindled from the Pequots before slaughtering them. I assured him that I will give his address and his child's Manhattan address to incredibly brave American Indian suicide bombers, should any arise to redress the outrages he still profits from. He told me that I had been hurtful, but I had thought it hurtful of him to admire the blowing up of parents and children who were no different from him and his kids, except that possibly they were more innocent.

I am not claiming that one imperialism justifies another. I am doubting that Israelis are the imperialists it pleases their European and American critics to think they are, when, really, the critics are writhing in their own pasts. The Jews certainly didn't come to Palestine as the British did to colonies all over the world. The British colonizers weren't fleeing mass slaughter or expulsion, as the Jews were. The British had no historical ties or religious claims to South Africa, Australia, Canada, New England, or the other places they seized and now call home. Shouldn't they leave?

Jews in Palestine are different enough to remind us of one more historical irony their critics assiduously ignore: The Jewish nation-state was modeled somewhat along the lines of the ethno-racial nation-states that had pushed Jews out in the 1920s and '30s while reconstituting themselves from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian, and German empires. These new European entities' celebrations of "blood and soil" nationalism made their centuries-old Jewish communities feel the ground shifting under their feet and convinced them they could be free only in a nation-state of their own.

Hello? Is this really so hard for anti-Israel demonstrators in the streets of Berlin, Paris, and London to understand? Apparently, it is. Europeans, having learned the folly of "blood and soil" solidarities during the Gotterdammerung of World War II, and justly proud of the European Union, now instruct Jews whom they displaced beforehand that their nation-state is out of fashion, an anachronism in a trans-national, global-capitalist world. Yet Jews are now surrounded by peoples touting an Arabist "blood and soil" solidarity that again renders them outsiders, even in their own ancestral land.

So the Jews are an anomaly, and, given the history I've just cited, it's tempting to tell their European and American critics, "Get used to it, and if you're wondering why this anomaly exists, look into yourselves, and give the Israelis a little lag time."

But while it's tempting to say this, I can't insist on it. For Israel is becoming an anachronism, for reasons that must be faced by those of us who aren't as hypocritical as its moralizing critics. It is an anachronism partly because of the psyche or mindset I first encountered in Palmer, Massachusetts -- that understandable but dysfunctional defensiveness toward a world that has liberalized in some ways but that also excuses or even encourages some Arabs for going in the opposite direction.

Israel has come closer than any state in the Middle East, even Turkey, to being a European-style social democracy -- even, at least partially, for those of its Palestinians who vote and receive social services that are the envy of Arabs elsewhere. But, caught almost alone regionally in the riptides of global capitalism and in its own Spartan defensiveness against the demagogic rage rising all around it, Israel may wind up abandoning its "social democracy" for a Singapore-like market economy, and it has returned hatred for hatred in ways that only deepen hatred and that erode democracy at home.

As long as Israel occupies lands it conquered almost defensively in 1967 but now claims historically and entrepreneurially, it further erodes its democracy, and, for demographic reasons alone, it can remain a Jewish state only by abandoning any pretense of democracy at all.

Can Israel back out of this tightening vise of embattlement, abandonment, and demography? It can't do so alone. But read some of the columns in the daily newspaper Haaretz to see what many Israelis think, and pay heed to the best of the country's public intellectuals and veteran policymakers, from Abraham Burg to Shlomo Ben-Ami to Aharon Barak, the former chief justice of the Supreme Court. (One of Israel's best resources is the credibility of its dissidents, who are anything but parlour leftists, having done their army service and been part of public life in many ways.)

It's impossible to imagine a significant shift in Israel's policies absent something like a civil-war with its own West Bank settlers, especially the budding Yigal Amirs and Baruch Goldsteins. Until this question has been settled, Israel's policies will be incoherent because it will not have decided what kind of country it is trying to be. But even the tens if not hundreds of thousands of Israelis who understand what is needed will never carry a traumatized and demagogued public without some shift in the equally dysfunctional mindset that rules Gaza and that has only been reinforced by its Israeli counterpart.

Israel needs a lot of disguised help from the very Arabs toward whom it has behaved too often as those Israeli camp staffers in Massachusetts did toward the community around them. Some help has been offered anyway in the Arab peace plan (which may reflect Arab states' fears of Hamas and Hezbollah more than it does any great

hope for lasting peace with Israel). And help might come from Palestinian leaders like Marwan Baghrouti, who no more deserves to be the political prisoner he is now than did King or Mandela, and from Palestinian lawyers like Hassan Jabarin.

Finally, though, and decisively, Israel will need a lot of tough love from the United States, far more than from "the international community," much of which is marinated in 20 hypocrisies like those mentioned above. Only the United States has enough credibility and clout with Israelis to make them face their own fanatical settlers and the darkest parts of their psyche and to test the more promising of Arab initiatives and leaders.

As of January 20, the U.S. will have in Barack Obama the necessary wisdom to push Israel in this direction. But will he, and we, have the will? Or will we let both Israel's neo-con apologists and Hamas' American counterparts make us, too, dysfunctional.

Note: To read the links in this piece you may have to use this url to get to the original post. I do hope that you will read the first and third links, especially.

[Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)  
[Gaza Needs a George Orwell Now](#)

By Jim Sleeper - January 11, 2009

(NOTE: This column prompted a 20-minute interview with NPR's Brian Lehrer on Jan. 15. You can hear it at: [Listen Here](#))

Israel is barring independent journalists from Gaza, but The New York Times, relying on Palestinian correspondents there, reports that "Hamis, with training from Iran and Hezbollah, has used the last two years to turn Gaza into a deadly maze of tunnels, booby traps and sophisticated roadside bombs. Weapons are hidden in mosques, schoolyards and civilian houses, and the leadership's war room is a bunker beneath Gaza's largest hospital, Israeli intelligence officials say."

The Times account of how cruelly both sides are fighting underscores how badly we need reporting like George Orwell's from the bloody Spanish Civil War in 1936. Orwell joined and fought for the democratic left against the fascist Franco, but he quickly found something his leftist readers didn't want to know: Franco wasn't the only evil enemy of freedom in Spain.

If a new Orwell informs us that Israel, although it's hideously cruel and wrong, isn't the only evil enemy of freedom in Gaza, will anyone want to know?

Orwell watched Stalinists, the supposed champions of democracy, killing not only fascists but also other leftist and liberal democrats. He learned that the Stalinists were fighting less for Spanish republican freedom than for Spanish submission to Moscow. "The Communist influence in Barcelona was not progressive but reactionary," as Orwell put it.

The leftist British New Statesman and Nation refused to publish his reportage. That drove him to write his great book *Homage to Catalonia*, which also had trouble finding a publisher. Franco was so truly and obviously bad that no one wanted to hear that some of those fighting him were just as bad, possibly worse.

A reviewer of *Homage* for the Daily Worker called Orwell a "disillusioned little middle class boy" who couldn't stomach a tough fight for freedom. But it was Orwell who could stomach the truth, while, to this day, defenders of the idealistic but naive young American leftists who went to Spain in 1936 still deny what they actually served. That denial is sustained by the fact that Franco won, sparing us any disillusionment with a Communist Spain.

If Israel in Gaza can be likened in some ways to the fascists in Catalonia, can Hamas be likened to Stalinists who seemed (and sometimes were) heroic but carried a dreadful poison of their own? Read the Times story now, and hope that an Orwell will get into Gaza and tell us the truth, even if it includes things that some of us may not want to know.

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[Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)

[How and \(How Not\) to Assess Israel's Moral Self-Destruction](#)

By Jim Sleeper - January 15, 2009, 9:26AM

Israel's blind, crushing, doomed war on Gaza has ended the Jewish people's 65-year-long reprieve from anti-Semitism since the Holocaust, a reprieve that encompassed most of our lifetimes, during which even dedicated Jew-haters bit their tongues.

No more. Amid the cacophony of justified condemnations we hear the strains of an older, creepier chorus. It is not too much to say that Israel has brought this upon itself, but it is also not too much to say that some rather perverse people have wanted and orchestrated it, as well.

I don't mean that strong critics of Israel should quiet down. It's long past time to break the taboo in the U.S. media on talking about Israel's blunders at least as frankly as Israelis themselves so famously do. But I do mean to say that Israel's conduct of this war would be hideous and heartbreaking enough without the encouragement it's getting from its impassioned defenders as well as from critics who don't know their history and who sometimes sound as if they don't want to know.

And there is a deeper political problem: Like the bloody combatants of the IDF and Hamas and Hezbollah, word warriors on both sides don't see that the odds of winning justice through state violence and through wars of liberation have sunk since World War II. The commentators' blindness is as willful as the commanders'. And as fateful. And not just for Palestinians or Jews.

Look with me briefly at an accomplished writer on each side of this war -- Chris Hedges, a scourge of Israel, and Jeff Goldberg, a sinuous defender. Then look at how Abraham Burg and Jonathan Schell argue, far more constructively -- and from no less experience -- that although human nature hasn't changed, the costs and consequences of violence have, as have the most effective ways to defeat tyranny and secure human dignity.

You may not think that we need to hear from such dreamers at a moment like this. But Burg and Schell are the realists. Historic shifts in freedom's always cloudy prospects have confounded not only grand strategists and their apologists in national-security states (Britain, the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and fortress Israel), but also guerrillas and supporters of national-liberation movements (in China, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Palestine).

Neither group seems aware that movements led by Gandhi, King, Mandela (after prison), Havel, Michnick and the principals in Northern Ireland have re-constituted and re-defined political power away from violence, sidelining established tyrannies and the would-be tyrants and nihilists within their own movements.

Writers and observers can help this transition if they believe that creative, disciplined non-violence isn't merely a dream of chumps, naifs, or schlemiels. Tough, savvy veterans of conflict have shown that we don't have to rush toward the dead ends toward which the combatants and enablers of IDF and Hamas are beckoning us.

In 2002, amid the war on terror and the run-up to the Iraq war, Chris Hedges, a former New York Times war correspondent in Bosnia, Latin America, and Israel, published his mordantly titled book *War is a Force That Gives us Meaning*. More recently, he has published *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on*

America and a torrent of articles about injustices perpetrated by elites at home and abroad, not least through and by Israel.

A Characteristic of Hedges' torrent of condemnations is this passage from "The Language of Death," a Jan. 12 post in Truthdig:

"The incursion into Gaza is not about destroying Hamas. It is not about stopping rocket fire into Israel. It is not about achieving peace. The Israeli decision to rain death and destruction on Gaza, to use the lethal weapons of the modern battlefield on a largely defenseless civilian population, is the final phase of the decades-long campaign to ethnically cleanse Palestinians. The assault on Gaza is about creating squalid, lawless and impoverished ghettos where life for Palestinians will be barely sustainable. It is about building ringed Palestinian enclaves where Israel will always have the ability to shut off movement, food, medicine and goods to perpetuate misery. The Israeli attack on Gaza is about building a hell on earth."

Hedges may well have read the cooler but otherwise wholly compatible assessment of Israel's 42-year mishandling of Gaza which I showcased here on January 4, by Darryl Li, a former public information officer for the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. Hedges and Li could do more to advance justice if they'd help us answer questions about violent resistance such as the following:

Is it true that Hamas is what it is mainly because Israel's policies are what they are? Or is there more to learn from a serious account of how and why Zionism and Palestinian nationalism arose at the same time?

Would Hedges (and Li) prefer a two-state solution, or Israel's absorption into a bi-national, democratic state whose majority would be Palestinian? If the latter would human rights and civil rights fare better there than they have under Israeli occupation and for Israel's 1.5 million Arab citizens within the 1967 borders? What new balance of Israeli responsibility and Israeli-Palestinian interdependency might release these enemies from their degrading mutual loathing?

When Israelis say that they see no Palestinian or Arab disposition to serious self-government, to what extent are they right? To what extent are they just racist? To what extent are they rationalizing their obsession about their own security at the expense of everyone else's? Have they been devoured by war as a force that gives them meaning? Won't peace depend on getting the balance of truth right as much as it does on condemning the fighting?

Finally, does Hedges, who often recounts his first-hand witness of Israeli soldiers shooting Palestinian children for sport, think it inevitable that every drop of blood drawn by the oppressor's lash will be avenged with blood drawn by the Arab sword, perhaps until Israelis are driven into the sea, having brought their destruction upon themselves? Does Hedges also accept the 19th-century blood-and-soil assumption that Jews never belonged in the Middle East, anyway? Or does he see a better way to reconcile power and justice?

I have read some of Hedges' and Li's writings, but I haven't yet found their answers to such questions. I do know enough to say that the passage I've quoted from Hedges has to do not only with Israel and Palestine but also with his well-justified but not-so-well focused rage at injustice and hypocrisy in the world, especially the kind sown by the American national-security state and its apologists. Hedges has become a volcano, erupting in Truthdig, Harper's, and elsewhere.

Recently, for example, he wrote with molten fury of the supercilious disdain he'd experienced at the hands of preppies and parvenus while in college. He has also laced into "America the Illiterate," the Christian right, Bush's nuclear apocalypse, fellow war correspondents, and more.

Hedges, who grew up in Maine and in rural parishes in upstate New York, where his father was a Presbyterian minister, comes from a tough, old, working-class Yankee culture for which I have a fond if somewhat testy

regard. A one-time Harvard Divinity School student, Hedges erupts along the venerable if somewhat wearying lines of a New England Puritan jeremiad, the denunciatory sermon whose purpose, in the hands of such latter-day Puritans as the abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe, has been to blast open new pathways to redemption on earth, if not in heaven.

America would be poorer and meaner without these prophets. They strengthened Lincoln's melancholy commitment to the divine inexorability of bloody justice, steeling him to fight the Civil War to its bitter end. But who is The Union in Palestine, and who are the Rebels? Israel in Gaza now resembles Sherman in Atlanta, but if you look around just a bit, you find that Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran have been playing a long, slow game to turn the tables. They are tramping out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored, and the demographic and now moral odds will soon favor their theocratic, blood-and-soil vindication.

Hedges knows that his own ancestral Yankee Protestantism blessed the dispossession and slaughter of the inhabitants of the lands his family now calls home. He knows that it also anticipated and encouraged Zionism. The Rev. George Bush, for example, a New Hampshire Presbyterian by upbringing, the fifth-generation lineal antecedent of our departing president, and the first professor of Hebrew and Arabic at New York University in 1835, wrote a long tract on the Book of Ezekiel that foretold the restoration of the Jews to Palestine from all over the world for Armageddon.

If Hedges (and certain editors at Harper's and Truthdig) feel even subliminally that they have a thing or two to live down, displace or project onto the Jews, the stars certainly have certainly aligned right for eruptions like Hedges' most recent post.

But there is more to it than that. My own sense is that both Israel and Palestine will have to undergo their own civil wars to defeat the fanaticism that is now driving them, but Hedges' anger seems to have driven him to a somewhat reductionist analysis of causes and consequences. A similar moralism sometimes led supporters of "national liberation movements" to look away when those movements became brutal, tyrannical and even genocidal, in lands we thought they had liberated, but I cannot say that Hedges has gone that far. Rather, he confines his blame of Hamas to an elliptical line or two. He does give Israeli dissidents some credit, but he seems to hold no more hope for them than he does blame for Hamas.

A few days after Hedges' condemnation of Israel appeared in Truthdig, the New York Times op-ed page ran Jeffrey Goldberg's "Why Israel Can't Make Peace With Hamas." There, as in virtually every article of Goldberg's I can recall, we learn that Goldberg, a Long-Island-born Israeli army veteran, has once again defied amazing personal dangers - as he did in the African bush, in Lebanon, in Gaza, and more - and walked right up to question people who, he gives us to understand, would just as soon slit his throat as squint at him. In a variation on this theme, other Goldberg articles parade his apparently easy familiarity with great leaders, from John McCain to Ehud Olmert, who for some reason talk to him as frankly they would in a private conversation with a brother-in-law.

I can't pretend to account for how Goldberg accomplishes these journalistic feats, but I do think I can take account of what they accomplish. If Hedges has become a volcano of denunciations of American imperialism and elitism and its spawn, Goldberg has become a geyser of irresistibly entertaining, informative, cagey, and often duplicitous neo-con explanations for everything, from the likelihood of a Saddam-Osama connection or of the fractured nobility of McCain's presidential bid to the Israelis' damned-if-we-do, damned-if-we-don't bravery in the face an Arab world that, we are assured, has wanted to exterminate them since long before 1948, let alone 1967 or last month.

The one exception to Goldberg's neo-conservative propagandizing I can recall is a chilling piece he wrote for The New Yorker in 2004 about fanatical Jewish settlers on the West Bank. He has not written for the New Yorker for awhile now and seems more comfortable with the crypto-conservative Atlantic Monthly, where he has a blog, and with such crypto-conservative New York Times opinion editors as Chris Suellentrop and Sam

Tanenhaus, who, in that paper's titanic struggle with Rupert Murdoch, have embedded themselves among its liberals somewhat as Allah's enforcers have embedded themselves in a Palestinian population that is now not so happy to have them. It is thanks to such editors that we have had no shortage of op-ed pieces by Donald Rumsfeld, Douglas Feith, or the American Enterprise Institute's Danielle Pletka. And they have certainly opened the spigot for Goldberg.

In yesterday's Times op ed Goldberg reintroduced us to the late Hamas chieftain Nizar Rayyan -- "husband of four, father of 2012, scholar of Islam and unblushing executioner," an "important recruiter of suicide bombers until Israel killed him two weeks ago" - who in 2006, Goldberg tells us with feigned nonchalance, "confessed to me one of his frustrations." Rayyan despised his fellow Palestinians in Fatah as sell-outs to the Jews, whom he told Goldberg are descended from pigs and apes and are "a curse to anyone who lives near them."

Ever self-dramatizing, Goldberg wants us to marvel that Rayyan even talked with him – and talked theology with him, no less! He certainly makes clear that Hamas' intractable beliefs discredit Israeli leaders' expectation that "Hamas can be bombed into moderation." But Goldberg hastens to add, on the evidence of the same fanaticism he has so entertainingly presented, that "Hamas cannot be cajoled into moderation," either. We are left to conclude that we might as well bomb.

"The only small chance for peace today," Goldberg concludes somewhat airily, "is the same chance that existed before the Gaza invasion: The moderate Arab states, Europe, the United States, and mainly, Israel, must help Hamas' enemy, Fatah, prepare the West Bank for real freedom, and then hope that the people of Gaza, vast numbers of whom are unsympathetic to Hamas, see the West bank as an alternative to the squalid vision of [Hezbollah in Lebanon] and Nizar Rayyan."

Does Goldberg really have any faith in this hope, which he twirls like a velvet cape to conclude his frightening performance? Mightn't this have been the moment to raise the possibility that Israel's invasion of Gaza has discredited Fatah and its leader Mahmoud Abbas, who is now widely thought by Palestinians fleeing Israeli bombs to be the obsequious collaborator with Israel that Rayyan always claimed he is?

Mightn't this also have been the moment for Goldberg to note that Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan, of the Nation of Islam, both subscribed to the same theology that considered whites, and especially Jews, as descendants of pigs and apes? Goldberg might then have noted that Malcolm changed toward the end of his life and that, last summer, Farrakhan made a penitential, almost desperate endorsement of Barack Hussein Obama, who exemplifies for Muslims and Jews a peace-making way to campaign which Goldberg didn't understand or expect would win.

No matter, for surely Goldberg's Times piece has had its intended effect: It has cajoled or scared at least some liberal Times readers into concluding Israel must fight in Gaza to the bitter end.

Maybe so, and maybe Goldberg's scoop on the thinking of Rayyan explains why. Except that, on January 2, shortly after Rayyan was killed, Chris Hedges wrote, in Truthdig, that "I often visited Nizar Rayan [different spelling, same man]... who would meet me in his book-lined study...." Hedges is a lot more regretful than Goldberg that when Israeli F-16s attacked that house, Rayan "was decapitated in the blast. His body was thrown into the street by the explosions. His four wives and 11 children also were killed." Other reports, including Goldberg's, say that two of the four wives were killed, but Hedges is engaging in literary protest as much as reporting. When he acknowledges briefly some things about Rayan that would lead most of us to conclude he had to be stopped, you know that a "but" is coming:

"Rayan supported tactics, including suicide bombings, which are morally repugnant. His hatred of Israel ran deep. His fundamentalist brand of Islam was distasteful. But as he and I were students of theology our discussions frequently veered off into the nature of belief, Islam, the Koran, the Bible and the religious life. He was a serious, thoughtful man who had suffered deeply under the occupation and dedicated his life to

resistance. He could have fled his home and gone underground with other Hamas leaders. Knowing him, I suspect he could not leave his children. Like him or not, he had tremendous courage.”

The rest of Hedges’ “but” is his description of Gaza City itself. Here he rises briefly to reportage which Orwell might have given us, on the deprivation and squalor Israel has forced upon Gaza. He doesn’t question whether recruiting suicide bombers is a more effective a response, any more than Goldberg questions whether Rayyan’s fanaticism justifies Israel’s destruction of Gaza City.

Both Hedges and Goldberg know of Avraham Burg, the former Knesset Speaker and head of the Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization. An officer in the paratroop corps, Burg became disillusioned with the Lebanon war of 1982. In 1983, he was wounded by a grenade, not in Lebanon but in a Peace Now demonstration he’d joined in Jerusalem. Both Hedges and Goldberg need a long sit-down with him now.

Hedges needs it because Burg, who shares most of his criticisms of the Israeli government and public, could broaden his understanding, sensibility, and horizons. And Goldberg needs it because Burg, who knows everything he does about Israel’s enemies and more, has reached different conclusions about how Israel should respond.

Here I must let Burg speak for himself, as I did Darryl Li of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights on January 4. Then I will close with a few words about the writer and Yale lecturer Jonathan Schell, a veteran war correspondent in his own right and a brilliant expositor of the new prospects for re-balancing power and violence.

In a recent column for the Israeli daily Haaretz entitled, "Why the West Can't Win," Burg writes the following, as only Israelis, who've all served together in a citizen army, can sometimes write to one another but as Suellentrop (who has just left op ed and moved to the Sunday magazine) seldom let many write in the Times:

"Beyond the two piles of bodies and the mourning and bereavement of both peoples, through the fragmented voices of Israel's leadership, it's already possible to feel the sour taste of the next combat loss. We haven't won anything since the Six-Day War. We managed to be saved from disaster in 1973, we got ensnared but survived in 1982, and there is no lack of other examples.....

"I think it's no longer possible to win wars. We're not the only ones who can't; the West as a whole is incapable of doing so. It's hard for me to remember a single war in the past 60 years that the United States clearly and decisively won..... Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed, and from there the West embarked on a new path.

"Western Europe almost totally abandoned the war option. It doesn't fight, and in any case isn't assessed on the basis of its ability to win wars. The United States, by contrast, went from isolationism to being the country chiefly responsible for Western state-sponsored violence. It... knows better than anyone how to deploy its forces to the starting line, but from there onward something always gets messed up. Korea wasn't a wonderful victory, Vietnam ended in disgrace, and the Gulf wars are not considered great military achievements. It looks like something in the DNA of the West no longer allows it to declare war like it used to do.... The wars of the previous century, along with the Holocaust of European Jewry, taught the West several lessons, central among which is the abolition of the doctrine of war; the West went from destroying and humiliating the enemy to maintaining [the enemy's] ability to rehabilitate itself, preserve its dignity, change and become a partner instead of a rival.

"....That's where the new type of victory began - the kind that doesn't wipe out the possibility of dialogue with yesterday's rival. .... The question remains as to how a just society fights enemies who do not share the same value system, and how to redefine what victory is.

"It seems to me that if the goal of a war is the destruction of the enemy, it is a war that is doomed to fail. For reasons that are well-known to us, it is no longer possible to annihilate nations or at least suppress their aspirations of independence. .... And if no dialogue with the enemy develops, then the war must be deemed a failure.

"It therefore appears that Israel's leadership in the Gaza war is due to fail in our names - just like the Palestinian religious leaders ushering their people to another failure rooted in ignoring the metamorphosis of the concept of victory, from subduing to talking, from slaughtering to bridge-building. Just as bridges were ultimately built above the tempestuous waters between Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima, between Dresden and London, and between Catholic and Protestant Dublin, there is a bridge between Sderot and Gaza. Those who do not tread on it will lead their nations to failure in all their wars."

But what is that bridge, when Israel is facing Hezbollah's 30,000 rockets to its North, Hamas' intransigence to its South, a rising proportion of increasingly disaffected Arabs within its own borders, and Iran's connivances and nuclear ambitions to its East? For those chastened and disciplined enough to go beyond Hedges' logic of Puritan condemnation of beleaguered and somewhat paranoid Israelis and beyond Goldberg's logic of jaunty neo-conservative defiance, Jonathan Schell's *The Unconquerable World* is the best way to survey the history and emerging premises of the very different logic that guided Gandhi, King, the later Mandela, the European dissidents, and the peacemakers of Northern Ireland.

Schell does not address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but perhaps that's for the best. He does show how peoples that were as oppressed, beleaguered, and overpowered as the Palestinians managed to neutralize or even win over their venomous oppressors without eliminating them, and, indeed, without much bloodshed.

People long accustomed to obey others can and do learn instead how to act together, through an inner, inevitably somewhat spiritual as well as democratic faith that's disciplined enough to sustain power through mutual trust, not through reliance on outside ecclesiastical and military authorities that promise only to save them from one another. In our own lifetimes, people who have learned this discipline have been able to dissolve vast systems of authority that had shrunk their freedom with false promises of deliverance.

Is it a fool's errand in the Middle East? Not necessarily, especially considering the alternatives. Again, Hedges, although he does not mention Burg, acknowledges Israeli dissidents like Ury Avneri, Gideon Levy, and Tom Segev, who, while sometimes threatened, have not been drowned out in the cacophony of Israeli debate. Many Israeli democrats are neither foolish nor embittered. It would be irresponsible of Americans who are disillusioned with Israel not to find ways to support them vigorously instead of savoring jeremiadically the prospect of Israel's destruction for its sins.

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Whether or not the Muslim world can produce a Ghandi or a Mandela remains to be seen, but stories like Goldberg's are being written and published by people who do not believe that it can happen and want to spare anyone the thought that it can. In commentators as well as commanders, that kind of blindness sheds blood, and it licenses people who should know better to equate Jews with something they are not, but something they have come to resemble.

[Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)

[U.K. and U.S. Drop Their \(and Israel's\) Grand Strategy](#)

By Jim Sleeper - January 19, 2009

Four days ago British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, writing in *The Guardian*, gave a slap in the face to George W. Bush and to Ehud Olmert, two departing comrades in the Global War on Terror, by saying that the War on Terror was a mistake.

Her Britannic Majesty's chief diplomat didn't mention either man by name, of course. But his declaration, along with Barack Obama's arrival in the Oval Office, puts Israel's politicians and their American interference runners such as AIPAC and Jeffrey Goldberg on notice that Israel is being cut loose ideologically by the great powers on whom it has relied so heavily for so long. And not a moment too soon.

Not only is the very concept of a war on terror "misleading and mistaken," Miliband writes, echoing many before him; he also writes that the West cannot "kill its way out" of the threats, least of all through military action that's all-but divorced from other initiatives, as was Israel's horrific venture into Gaza.

Without mentioning that war, Miliband ratifies what the veteran Israeli legislator and Avraham Burg wrote in a Haaretz column which I posted here, and he underscores what the Gaza war itself has just shown: War is no longer quite the option that those who still thrill to it think it is.

There is another message I think Miliband was sending to Vulcan neo-conservatives and other would-be grand strategists in the Bush mold and their tragic followers in Israel. It's a message first sent by one of their least favorite people, the political philosopher and social historian Hannah Arendt.

In 1944, when there was no justice for Jews in the world, and nothing but power politics and armed resistance seemed to hold any hope, Arendt warned that if Zionists "continue to ignore the [forging of partnerships with neighboring] Mediterranean peoples and watch out only for the big, faraway powers, they will appear only as... the agents of foreign and hostile interests. Jews who know their own history should be aware that... the anti-Semitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of the foreign big powers... but had actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences..."

"The big nations that can afford to play the game of power politics have found it easy to forsake King Arthur's Round Table for the poker table; but the small, powerless nations [the Jews in Palestine] that venture their own stakes in that game, and try to mingle with the big, usually end by being sold down the river."

Now they'll have to hear this not from Arendt, but from the U.S. and the U.K., who aren't exactly selling them down the river but are confronting them with a reality the Israelis themselves have done a lot to make.

In the 1980s, Secretary of State George Shultz and his top aide Charles Hill spent a lot of time selling an all-too-receptive Menachem Begin on the virtues of scaling back social democracy and relying more and more on "free markets" (including arms markets) and war. Israelis now insist, with some credibility, on the "existential reality" of having to fight Arabs unrelentingly. But reality did not have to end up this way.

A lot of wrong and fateful strategies and policies were adopted, and now the West has learned what Israel hasn't, but must -- if, indeed, it's not too late: That you can't bludgeon 1.5 million penned-up people into submission without strengthening the worst and most vengeful among them.

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### [Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)

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### [Truth-Digging Requires Full Reports, Not Sermons](#)

By Jim Sleeper - January 21, 2009

In four columns this month at TPM Café and an interview with Brian Lehrer on New York's NPR station I've developed an assessment of "Israel's blind, crushing, doomed war on Gaza." In one column I criticized two reporters on either side -- Chris Hedges, for imposing a divinity school moralism about imperial wars and the necessity of resistance that strays into apologetics for Hamas; and Jeffrey Goldberg, for his "irresistibly entertaining, informative, cagey, and often duplicitous neo-con explanations for everything" that promote fear more than understanding.

Hedges has responded sermonically and loftily enough to reinforce my assessment somewhat. He also neglects blogging's first commandment by failing to cite or link for his Truthdig readers the provocation he's answering.

That keeps them from digging truth for themselves. But Hedges has some important points to make, so let me set this right with a quick summary of my arguments and his and with a few observations.

In "Can There Be Politics in Tragedy? Or in Gaza?" on Jan. 4, I presented at length Darryl Li's scathing, telling indictment of Israel's exploitative, increasingly Vulcan policies toward Gaza across 40 years, even after its withdrawal from the territory in 2005. But Li doesn't tell us whether he thinks Israel deserves to survive, so in "How Dysfunctional is Israel?" on Jan. 9, I tried to explain why such a question has come to seem legitimate and cautioned against equating Israelis with imperialists or Nazis. Israel itself was born of the necessity of resistance and even had founders whose methods anticipated the better as well as the worse sides of Hezbollah or Hamas.

Israel did bring liberal democracy to the Middle East. Israel's Supreme Court just overturned a government ban on Arab parties' participation in the February election; if that's merely a crumb from the table of people who've denied Arabs any real sovereignty in Palestine, compare it with how Egypt or any other Middle East state treats its dissident parties, Arab or otherwise.

Some on the left have tired of liberal democracy and found romance in cultural- and national-liberation movements. But that way of thinking doesn't justify the Arab movements any better than it does the Jewish one. Each side now thinks it's a Warsaw ghetto rising against oppressors, each with some justice, as I explained here earlier - Gazans for reasons that are agonizingly obvious at the moment, Israel for reasons that aren't far away in its past or its future.

I called for truth-telling as good as George Orwell's from the Spanish-American War, prompting the 20-minute NPR interview I hope my critics will hear. In "How (and How Not) to Assess Israel's Moral Self-Destruction," I explained why neither Hedges nor Goldberg is the Orwell we need. I commended Avraham Burg, Jonathan Schell, and the prospects of coercive non-violence, which is not pacifism.

Finally, just before Barack Obama's inauguration, I noted -- in "U.K. and US Drop Their (and Israel's) Grand Strategy" - that over the years Israel, seeking protection from the big powers, had adopted "A lot of wrong and fateful strategies and policies", only to find itself isolated by a West that has learned - or pretends to have learned - what Israel hasn't, but must, "if, indeed, it's not too late: That you can't bludgeon 1.5 million penned-up people into submission without strengthening the worst and most vengeful among them."

In his Truthdig response Chris Hedges now proclaims his detestation of Hamas' "religious fundamentalism and the use of suicide bombing" as well as "the group's anti-Semitism and ruthless silencing" of Palestinian opponents. "But there are moments when a people face the terrible tragedy of resistance or obliteration," he writes. "This was true in Sarajevo. It is true for the Palestinians. It does not make it pretty or good. It is what happens."

This is pretty much my argument in all of the columns I've mentioned, except that, unlike Hedges, I think that if we really want to talk about "what happens" even when it's not pretty or good, we need to talk about Israel that way, too. Israel's most righteous critics cannot or will not do this, fired up as they are by Israel's outrages in Gaza.

I understand them. When Gaza's main hospital was going up in flames, I began my own column on Hedges and Goldberg with an outcry against Israel for ending the 65-year-long reprieve Jews have enjoyed from anti-Semitism. I accused Hedges and Goldberg not of anti-Semitism but of one-sided reporting that enables or provokes it.

I also wrote that "a similar moralism sometimes led supporters of 'national liberation movements' to look away when those movements became brutal, tyrannical and even genocidal, in lands we thought they had liberated,

but I cannot say that Hedges has gone that far. Rather, he confines his blame of Hamas to an elliptical line or two."

Hedges corrects that imbalance now in Truthdig but then segues eerily into a jeremiad against pacifism, warning that those "who call on the Palestinians to embrace nonviolence preach an airy utopianism." He quotes Reinhold Niebuhr, usually a bad sign in a journalist, even a former divinity student like Hedges.

He means to answer my commendation of coercive non-violence, but it's a mistake to cite Niebuhr's conviction that violence was necessary against Hitler because he wouldn't have been softened by a Gandhi. That leaves the impression that Israelis would respond like Hitler were they confronted by a massive, disciplined nonviolent Palestinian movement, in the glare of the international media.

Does Hedges think that? Or is he just side-stepping the uncomfortable question (which I, too, can't answer, but at least am asking) of whether there's any religious or cultural warrant in Islam for the coercive non-violence of a Martin Luther King, Jr., who had studied Niebuhr and whom Niebuhr revered for his strategies and faith?

Whether or not there is a precedent in Islam (or in Judaism, for that matter), is Israel really like Hitler? Or has it become somewhat like the segregationist American South and even like South Africa - both of which ultimately bowed to the wisdom of coercive but non-violent people they'd oppressed? We need reporters whose moralism (as in Hedges) or partisanship (as in Goldberg) doesn't get in the way of helping Israelis and the rest of us to decide.

We need reporters who know that Israel's history and current political culture includes not only the Hamas-like Irgun, which produced Menachem Begin, a hero to American Vulcan conservatives such as Yale's Charles Hill, the top foreign policy adviser to Rudy Giuliani's presidential campaign. Israel also includes liberal, social-democratic leaders, from Hannah Arendt and Judah Magnus to its recently retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak, with many in between.

There are Israelis -- I met some while working as a student on an Arab-Jewish relations project in Israel and the West Bank 1969 -- who want to work with Palestinians to make the desert bloom. They also want to heed Arendt's warning (of 1944) that if Zionists "continue to ignore the [forging of partnerships with neighboring] Mediterranean peoples and watch out only for the big, faraway powers, they will appear only as... the agents of foreign and hostile interests. Jews who know their own history should be aware that... the anti-Semitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of the foreign big powers... but had actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences..."

These Israelis have lost political battles, owing partly to the country's transformation under the self-congratulatory tutelage of Americans. Perhaps Barack Obama can help them to win a few political battles now. But if Arendt's warning has meaning, Israelis, like Palestinians, will have to do it themselves, much as America has tried to do in electing Obama.

I don't think we'll see it in Israel's February elections, and Israel hasn't much time. Are its cruel, fateful missteps since 1967 irreversible? Or can they be redressed, as cruel strategies were in India, the American South, South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Eastern Europe? We don't need reporters who can't answer that question because their moralism or partisanship has stopped them from even asking it.

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[Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)  
[Israel's Only Way Out](#)

By Jim Sleeper - January 30, 2009

I'm less hopeful than some about the American news media's focus on the suffering in Gaza. Such coverage delivers no more political enlightenment than it does about any other disaster. Still, Israel's long, incoherent, destructive strategy for Palestinians does come into some focus with the images of 1.5 million people in a holding pen, as I noted here on January 4. Where does Israel go from here?

Perhaps the first thing to remember is that history cuts both ways. Soon we may learn that Hamas has tortured, maimed, or killed hundreds of Palestinians since Israelis left on Jan. 20. Slowly, American bleeding hearts will stop bleeding. The tragedy is that Israel's parliamentary democracy -- in which even the briefly-banned Arab parties will participate on Feb. 10 thanks to a Supreme Court unlike any other in the Middle East -- doesn't seem able to short-circuit the country's own part in this destructive spiral.

Israeli voters seem traumatized, paranoid. They can't blame only Hamas' and Hezbollah's obvious totalitarian and nihilistic streak, including the loathsome suicide bombings of 2002 and 2003, which some of Israel's critics oddly never mention. These nihilists have done much to push matters beyond the point of no return, but not they alone.

A lot must be blamed on Israel's excessive courting of big-power gamesmanship, against which Hannah Arendt warned so presciently; its rapacious market priorities (including arms markets); and its bone-headed citizenship, religious, and settlement policies, which have ratcheted up racism even (sometimes especially) among the 40% of Israeli Jews whose parents or grandparents grew up speaking Arabic in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq.

The cold bottom line is that for 40 years Israelis have tried to reduce Palestinians in the territories to the condition of American Indians, a defeated people surviving on smaller and smaller reservations or, at best, Bantustans. Where was the Marshall Plan or the confederative economic, EU-style effort backed by Israel (and the US)? I see only gestures and bromides along those lines from the three leading candidates in the Feb. 10 elections.

As the Gaza War raged this month, Michael Walzer, a political philosopher who edits a small journal called *Dissent*, lectured its readers on the proper use of the term "proportionality" in assessing the calculated relation of means to ends in Israel's venture. Walzer might now turn his talents to elucidate the proportionality of means to ends in Israel's policies toward Palestinians since 1967.

If Walzer would have us sideline the conflict's emotional and moral dimensions in order to think strategically, can he do it to help us see, factually and strategically, what Israel's intentions and conduct toward the Palestinians have been since 1967? Can he show us the tough choices and hopeful efforts that Israel made and that he supported, only to see them thwarted by unbending Arab rage?

Can Walzer recount how leaders of Labor, if not Likud, tried to nudge Israelis toward an understanding that Israel could survive only if Palestinians were enabled to build something better than Bantustans and Indian reservations? If he can't do that, could he please stop urging we understand proportionality as a calculated relation of means to ends?

The ineradicable difference between American Indians and Palestinians, of course, is that demographically and politically the tide is on the side of the latter. True, Hebrew was spoken in Palestine 1500 years before Arabic; and when the Romans conquered the Jews there and named it Palestine, not only wasn't there any Arabic in the area; Islam didn't exist, and wouldn't for another 800 years. But there were other native peoples; it was the Hebrews who were always on the move; and, today, their valid historical claims notwithstanding, Israel can survive as a Jewish fortress state only if it becomes like Singapore -- an increasingly authoritarian, racist society garrisoned against surrounding threats and desperation. Otherwise it will have to consider possibilities like those suggested by Seyla Benhabib in a recent essay, "What is Israel's End Game?", that is getting the attention it deserves.

Every step Israel takes in the direction of Singapore is killing off its beautiful, even unprecedented, social-democratic experiment with a rich confluence of cultures, including those of its Palestinian citizens and the Arabic strains in much of Israel's Jewish life.

I have little patience with American critics of Israel who know nothing about this and want to know less -- and show it by proposing academic boycotts of a country whose universities are among its strongest centers of self-criticism and even resistance. If the would-be boycotters knew anything, their hearts would be bleeding out of both sides. (And by their own logic, they'd have spent the past eight years boycotting themselves.)

But I do hope that the shift in American public opinion will strengthen President Obama's ability to send strong signals in the next few days that re-open Israeli political debate, and leadership, between now and the Feb. 10 elections. Otherwise, Israel will become a society that is harder to defend, and even to love.

## **II. American Neo-Conservatives' Folly**

These two columns are not about Gaza or Israel as such but about the intellectual and cultural dysfunction of several young American neo-conservatives whose work has accelerated the tragedy of blind support here in the U.S. for the wrong side in Israel.

[Talking Points Memo Cafe](#)

[The Pity of It All](#)

By Jim Sleeper - February 10, 2009

I'm sorry, but even as my colleagues at TPM Café parse the Israeli elections, I'm not quite done with Sam Tanenhaus, David Brooks, David Frum, William Kristol, and others who insinuated themselves so brilliantly into public discourse as "conservatives" in the 1990s and did so much damage to the American civil society and republic and therefore, not incidentally, to Israel itself.

Now they're trying to give American conservatism a decent burial as they strive, with unseemly haste and some inexcusable assistance, to get us to think well of themselves.

A few hours ago in Open Democracy I wrote that I'm not buying. (That column is pasted here below) These men should bury themselves for awhile -- in good books, long walks, quiet conversations, and, above all, public silence. Then I may forgive them for making the mistake of their lives -- and ours. But I doubt that I or, for that matter, honorable conservatives, will ever think well of them. Here's why.

There is a noble conservative sensibility or wisdom that many liberals are the poorer for missing. Conservatives are sometimes quite right about how liberals have been wrong. I've made such criticisms myself often enough not to disdain these men for strictly ideological or partisan reasons.

I disdain them for having betrayed the American republic and themselves as Americans, and for continuing to do it even as they re-position themselves without grounding themselves in the republic's deepest truths and strengths.

Why does this matter? Well, Tanenhaus edits both The New York Times Book Review and the paper's Week in Review. Brooks is a Times columnist, syndicated in dozens of other papers, and a regular on NPR and PBS. Frum, the wunderkind conservative manifesto-writer of the 1990s and ex-Bush speechwriter who coined "Axis of Evil," is running an ecumenical salon in his elegant Washington home. Kristol, now dumped from his Times column, has been taken up on a monthly basis by the Washington Post's embarrassing editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, and he also still edits the Weekly Standard and opines regularly on Fox Noise.

Still, so what? Isn't it true that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, et al needed no prompting or guidance from these perfervid neo-con savants and cheerleaders?

Actually, Tanenhaus, Brooks, Frum, Kristol, and others have raised serious doubts about American conservatism itself. But they've proved invaluable as the movement's and the Republican Party's propagandists, interpreters, and apologists. At critical moments in our verbose and semiotically overblown public square, they successfully beguiled or intimidated decent civic-republican doubters and critics.

1. They sold us a National Security Strategy, a national security state apparatus, and indeed a global war on terror that weakened the American republic and civil society even before these men led the stampede into the Iraq war. That horrified some honorable conservatives.

2. The question before America in those years wasn't whether we had enemies to defeat, but how to fight the "good fight" against them. I've read enough of these men's work to know that they understood very little about what makes a civic-republican society strong. They understood virtually nothing about the difference between authority and power, and between power and violence. Their grand strategies were close enough to Grand Old Opry or Grand Theft Auto doom the Grand Old Party.

3. To control or displace the damage they were doing, they consorted with, and covered for, would-be Grand Inquisitors in and out of the Justice Department.

4. They made a devil's bargain with "free markets" that aren't free or liberating -- a willful self-delusion on their part and a lasting fraud on the public.

5. They charged that liberal education had to be rescued from liberals, not realizing that liberals' obvious campus follies were reactive, not causal, to more powerful military-industrial and market-driven riptides that are compromising the humanities and civic-republican leadership training. They charged that universities had become nunneries for failed and aging leftist activists, only to end up funding and celebrating campus nunneries for failed and aging neo-cons like themselves.

Why did they do all this? Let me be frank, as one who knows from experience and much study: They did it in no small part out of preternatural and distinctively Jewish insecurities that fit hand-in-glove with the preternatural insecurities driving a Joe McCarthy (who had his Roy Cohn), a Richard Nixon (who had his Henry Kissinger), a Dick Cheney (who had his Irving "Scooter" Libby) or a Karl Christian Rove.

This demands a careful, historically informed accounting, so I'll say no more here. A strong chapter in the Yale sociologist Jeffrey Alexander's *The Civil Sphere*, while not about Tanenhaus, Brooks, Frum, or Kristol, maps and tracks social and historical currents that mark them far more deeply and predictably than they know. =20 So does Amos Elon's *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933*.

Do you find this chilling? Good. We're talking about the deep damage done by a dark, sorrowful history to victims who became Vulcans and have done a lot of harm themselves. But you should also be grateful that the American republic has proved better than they are and than other societies have been in the past. That's something to keep faith with, not batten onto and exploit, as they have done so blindly, for all their supposed patriotism and prescience.

By the way, some 80 percent of American Jews kept faith with the republic by voting for Obama, thereby rebuffing Tanenhaus, Brooks, Frum, and Kristol, not to mention more-cankered neo-cons such as Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League and Daniel Pipes of Campus Watch, who have abandoned most American Jews and most of America.

Precisely because our society is so open, however, these men's talent and cleverness enabled them to mount its great stages too early in life and to do what came to them almost instinctively before they knew quite what they were doing or why. Self-importance, a universal human temptation, took over from there. Now they need to take a break from themselves. And we from them. Earnest, younger people who've admired them, like Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, whose Grand New Party I review in the current Commonweal, need to take a big step back and find a new path.

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[US neo-cons jump the conservative ship](#)

by Jim Sleeper 10-02-2009

The predicament of Sam Tanenhaus reminds us that conservatism's original sin lies not in its bombastic and noxious neo-conservative interlopers, but in the tragic nature of conservatism itself

The high-end blogosphere has been aflutter over "Conservatism is Dead," the latest of Sam Tanenhaus' many long elegies in The New Republic for conservatism as a movement and an ideology. But no one has recalled, much less revisited, his dirge in a lecture at the heavily neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute in November 2007. Perhaps inadvertently, he put his finger then on American conservatism's original sin.

Tanenhaus, who edits The New York Times Book Review and the "Week in Review" section of that paper, began by noting that while conservatives had once chafed under the New Deal's soulless managerialism, they'd allowed ex-leftist conservatives such as James Burnham and Irving Kristol to lead them on a long march through institutions they despised, in an effort to build a managerial class of their own.

In Tanenhaus' telling, Kristol showed conservative business and political leaders that New Deal managerialism had bred a liberal "new class" of academic, think-tank, and media experts who trafficked in policy intellection more than in policymaking, but with significant consequences for the latter. He counseled conservatives to outdo liberals at this in order to rescue liberal education and liberal democracy for the kind of capitalism and politics conservatives could profit from and enjoy. They might even restore virtue to Progressive reforms and secure the enlightened "national greatness" conservatism of British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, whose American admirers would soon include Kristol's son Bill and Tanenhaus himself.

Kristol's auditors took his advice seriously enough to compound American conservatism's original sin - its incapacity to reconcile its yearning for ordered, sacred liberty with its obeisance to every riptide of the global capitalism that's destroying the nation, the republic, the values, and the customs that conservatives claim to cherish.

Through lavishly-funded initiatives such as New York City's Manhattan Institute, campus organizations, and private ventures such as Rupert Murdoch's journalism, conservatives generated a parody of the liberal "new class" - an on-message machine of talkers, squawkers, power groupies, and greedheads that Slate's Jacob Weisberg dubbed "the Con-intern."

The Con-intern's social ideas resembled Margaret Thatcher's more than Disraeli's. They were driven by a capitalist materialism that is as soulless as the Marxist dialectical materialism of their nightmares and that gave a false ring to conservative rhapsodies about civic-republican virtue. They glossed the displacement of the liberal counterculture with a degrading over-the-counter culture. They ignored conservatism's displacement of the New Deal's supposed "make-work" programs with the non-response to Katrina. They countered the "Vietnam syndrome" with the worst foreign-policy blunder in American history. Beneath the Con-intern's civic chimes and patriotic bombast, the civic republican spirit writhed in silent agony, forsaken by conservatism itself.

Tanenhaus knows all this, and at AEI he hinted that Irving Kristol knows it, too, but has become cynical and followed the money: "One could look over the trajectory of Mr. Kristol's brilliant career and see that he's in a different place in the 1990s than he was in the 1970s," Tanenhaus said, recalling that Kristol used to cite Matthew Arnold's cultural visions against Milton Friedman's vindications of greed.

Tanenhaus' wistful pleas for a politics of decency made me wonder then what conservatism could do besides push profits and spew guns, racism, sexism, and war to distract us all from the heartbreaking dissolution of the civic-republican ethos of getting along in the pursuit of a common good, of handling our losses without developing longstanding grudges.

Without question, the Con-intern has destroyed a lot of trust. While Tanenhaus stopped short of saying so in 2007, many conservatives of reputed discernment and high purpose had been sucked into the maelstrom, including the Kristols, the Podhoretzes (Norman and Norman's son John), the humiliatingly honor-obsessed Kagans (Thucydides scholar Donald and his sons Robert, the grasping power historian, and Frederick [the Great], an AEI military strategist), and the sophisticated New York Times columnist David Brooks.

Tanenhaus did plead for a conservatism of virtue and moral poise. He credited "my hero Bill Buckley" for pushing anti-Semitic and other extremists out of the movement. He cautioned against trying to destroy liberalism with "a language of accusations, ... of treason at home and of leftists who have the same values as Osama Bin Laden." He called for a culturally textured, sophisticated conservative critique and assailed "magazines I used to write for, such as Commentary, which accused the New York Times magazine, my newspaper, of violating the Espionage Act because it published an article exposing a surveillance program. That's revenge," he said.

But there was no such moral poise or textured critique in the preponderance of liberal-bashing book reviews that Tanenhaus was running in the Times. And the person in his AEI audience with whom he seemed most engaged - referring to him respectfully at least four times - was David Frum, a former Bush speechwriter who has sought to roll back the welfare state and a conservatism like Disraeli's that would have some care for the poor, but apparently is now reconsidering.

Tanenhaus invoked Lionel Trilling's distinction between an honorable sincerity that's anchored in faithfulness to a culture and a phony, individualist "authenticity" that betokens a narcissism in modern liberalism. He didn't mention Trilling's observation that, against even the vapid liberalism of his time, American conservatism had become a set of "irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas." In response to a question from AEI vice president Henry Olsen, Tanenhaus mentioned Whittaker Chambers' observation to Buckley in 1970 that, as he paraphrased it, "You can't build a clear conservatism out of capitalism because capitalism disrupts culture."

Well, what about that? Markets should be honored only in their place. New Deal managerialists knew that that requires a republican vigilance that profit-maximizing corporations inevitably try to subvert. Asked by historian Michael Kazin to explain the prospects for a small-government conservatism that's still tied to big government, including a military operation that's a virtual welfare state for its participants, Tanenhaus responded, "I'd be interested to hear what David Frum has to say on that," confessing himself a "total ignoramus about globalization issues."

The poignancy of Tanenhaus' predicament reminds us that conservatism's original sin lies not in its bombastic and noxious neo-conservative interlopers, accelerants of republican decay though they may be, but in the tragic nature of conservatism itself.

When conservatives vow to rescue liberal education and democracy from liberals, they mean sincerely to defend a classical, 18th-century liberalism that balances individuals' rights to life, liberty, and property with

individuals' responsibilities as republican citizens to rise sometimes above narrow self-interest, to act on shared moral commitments and sentiments.

Conservatives know that a balanced society, like a whole person, strides forward on both a left foot of social education and security - without which conservatives' cherished individuality couldn't flourish - and a right foot of irreducibly individual freedom and responsibility - without which even the best social engineering will turn persons in to clients, cogs, or worse. Society protects and nourishes the individual flame, but it cannot light that flame, and it should not try to extinguish it.

One's readiness or failure to light that flame originates in faith or natural law, which even a covenanted society may honor but cannot itself create or, ultimately, control. Conservatives charge, rightly, that many liberals have lost sight of this sublime truth and have over-emphasized public provision, swelling the left foot and hobbling everyone's stride.

Few elite liberals have a credible answer to this. Too many of them have done too well by the corporate capitalist system to attack its growing inequities with more than symbolic, moralistic gestures. Yet they can't bring themselves to defend it wholeheartedly, either. So, sensitive to individual rights and sufferings, they try to strengthen the left foot of social provision without strengthening personal responsibility. For that they rely on outside incubators of the virtues and beliefs which the liberal state and free markets need but by themselves nourish or enforce.

But most of the social mayhem rising around us is driven by the seductions and stresses of corporate consumer marketing and employment and of a capitalism only opportunistically invokes John Locke's Christian strictures, Adam Smith's theory of the moral sentiments, or a civic-republican nationalism that might reasonably be elevated by serious "liberal education."

Instead of taking these things as seriously as they claim to, conservatives careen back and forth from conflicting loyalties to a national-security state and a to post-nationalist global capitalism that dissolves republican virtue far more than terrorism has done. There is such a thing as "economic violence." It does eviscerate the villages that raise the children. Wall Street does subvert Main Street and morals.

The follies of Marxist ideologues have left a taboo against criticizing capitalism, whose twilight they'd announced a few times too often. But aren't we now in a relationship to capitalism analogous to that of American colonials to the British monarchy early in the 1760s? Colonials then still ardently professed affection for and dependence on the crown, even as they began to sense that their own sovereignty and dignity couldn't be reconciled with the empire's. They wound up risking their lives, fortunes and sacred honor to rearrange that.

Similarly, something basic will have to change relatively soon in how we configure and charter the vast profit-making combines that are degrading social equality and the rhythms and security of our daily lives, incapacitating many Americans as cultural actors and, hence, as free citizens.

Tanenhous tried fruitlessly in his lecture to square the circle of deceit that has drawn around us by the yawping brigades of conservative opportunists and partisans spawned by Irving Kristol and others. At AEI he presented himself - a bit disingenuously, I think, considering his accomplishments at the Times - as a learned, unassuming fellow who would lead no one anywhere. No wonder that other conservatives think that ex-liberals like Tanenhous and, for that matter, Irving Kristol, who came to conservatism offering strategic savvy and rhetorical cover for excellent adventures, have only worsened its plight.

Conservatives and liberals alike need to rediscover the American civic-republican tradition and to sacrifice some comforts to revive it. A few years ago I sketched that challenge in an essay about a long-forgotten uncle of the Connecticut anti-war Senate candidate Ned Lamont who had a "conservative" sensibility that many

liberals are the poorer for missing. And I waited for Tanenhaus to admit that conservatives can't reconcile their keening for an ordered, sacred liberty with their obeisance to every riptide of a capitalism that's dissolving the republic, values, and customs they claim to cherish.

Now, in *The New Republic*, he has admitted it. And he has resisted commendably his old temptation to blame liberals. Conservatives who dine out too often on liberals' follies forget how to cook for themselves and the whole society, and Tanenhaus has been a poor chef at the *Times*, as I showed in *The Nation*. But I hope that his coming biography of William F. Buckley, Jr. will equal his delicious one of Whittaker Chambers. And I hope that he, Frum, Brooks, and other erstwhile neo-cons who are now very busy trying to re-position themselves will take time to re-ground themselves in presumptions less damaging to the American civil-society and republic.

Jim Sleeper is a writer and teacher on American civic culture and politics and a lecturer in political science at Yale. He is the author of *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race* in New York (W.W. Norton, 1990) and *Liberal Racism* (Viking, 1997, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

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