SAPIR

IDEAS FOR A THRIVING JEWISH FUTURE

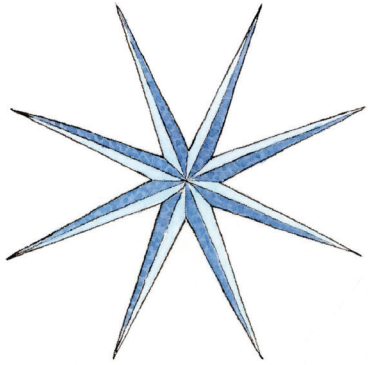
THE ISSUE ON

(FIXING) AMERICA

Vol. Twenty-One *Spring 2026*

And they saw the God of Israel:
Under His feet there was the
likeness of a pavement of
sapphire, like the very sky
for purity.

— Exodus 24: 10



Note on the cover: Ever since its erection in 1886, the Statue of Liberty has been a symbol of American freedom and promise. Millions of immigrants, many of them Jews, marveled at it upon arriving in New York Harbor after their long journeys. The funding effort for the statue included the composition of "The New Colossus," by the Jewish-American poet Emma Lazarus, which was emblazoned in bronze on the statue's pedestal in 1903, during the period of mass Jewish immigration from Europe and Russia. "A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning" read as particularly fitting when the torch was encased in scaffolding during the statue's 1984–1986 restoration project in advance of its 100th anniversary. This year, the 250th anniversary of our nation, there remains much to be restored, repaired, and renewed.

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SAPIR

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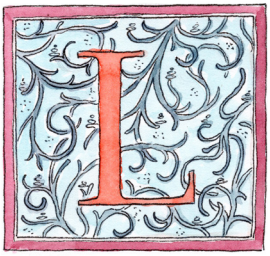


ONG before I became an American citizen—I grew up in Canada—I was an Americanophile. I loved America's story, her heroes, her passion. I believe in America as a proposition. During the Bicentennial, I memorized each and every one of those *Schoolhouse Rock!* commercials that taught me about the Constitution, American law, and the great American melting pot.

Now, as America celebrates her 250th birthday, all one reads is about a nation in decline, a nation whose best years are behind her.

America is not short on diagnoses. We have commissions, media panels, and "save America" nonprofit organizations in abundance. What we lack is confidence, confidence that our civic inheritance is worth repairing rather than discarding and confidence that serious reform is possible without first tearing everything down.

This issue of SAPIR begins from a simple judgment: America's institutions are strained, not spent. They are falling short in visible ways—on trust, on speech, on education, on civic formation—but they remain capable of renewal. Repair, not revolution, is the work of the moment.

For American Jews, the matter is not abstract. We have flourished in a (small-r) republican order that balances liberty and obligation, pluralism and cohesion. When that balance erodes, Jews feel it early. When it holds, we benefit disproportionately — not only as a minority but as citizens invested in the success of the whole. Jewish tradition is unambiguous on this point: With inheritance comes obligation. We must sustain and strengthen what we receive in trust before we pass it on.

The contributors to this issue do not agree on every remedy. They were not asked to. What they share is a refusal to indulge in despair or fantasy — to assume either that America is beyond repair or that renewal requires starting over. The essays that follow take America's institutions seriously, even when they are critical of them, and they insist that reform must be grounded in history, culture, and moral responsibility.

Throughout the issue, a common set of tensions recur: between liberty and security, openness and authority, individual rights and civic obligation. These are not new dilemmas, but they feel newly brittle in a distracted, polarized age. Fixing America, as these pages suggest, is less about discovering novel solutions than about recovering neglected disciplines — of attention, of formation, of service, and of restraint.

America's challenges cannot be understood in isolation. Domestic confidence and international credibility are linked; civic fragmentation at home shapes posture abroad. Any serious effort at renewal must therefore reckon with both — without collapsing one into the other and without mistaking moral clarity for simplicity.

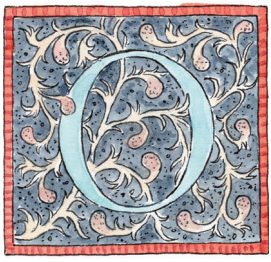
Fixing America is not a project for one party, ideology, or generation. It is the responsibility of those who have benefited most from the country's freedoms and institutions — and who understand that stewardship requires more than critique. It demands sustained investment in ideas, leadership, and civic capacity, so what we pass on is not diminished by neglect but strengthened by care.

That is the work this issue invites. We hope you will join us on this journey. ✳

JONATHAN D. SARNA

The Promise of Something Better

What the end of the postwar era portends



CTOBER 7 and its aftermath rang down the final curtain on the postwar era in American Jewish history, a period that saw Jews improve their lot decade by decade, rising by every measure: socially, economically, politically, and culturally. The Jewish religion, too, rose in status during this period, especially once the nation's self-definition as "Christian" gave way to "Judeo-Christian" and the notion of a tri-faith America—Protestant-Catholic-Jew—achieved mainstream acceptance. Postwar America became home to the largest Jewish community by far in the Diaspora, now more than 17 times the size of its nearest rival (France) and only a little smaller than the Jewish community of Israel. Jews who had lived for centuries in the rest of the world, especially Eastern Europe, Iran, the Arab world, and Latin America, fled to the United States and Israel during the postwar era, seeking security, freedom, and opportunity.

While American Jewry's status and numbers were rising, anti-Jewish discrimination as well as other forms of anti-Jewish hatred in the United States were subsiding. By the 1990s, most of my students at Brandeis told me that they *never* had personally experienced antisemitism; they had only heard about it from their grandparents. One former student wrote a book titled *The Death of American Antisemitism*, published in 2000, the year Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman became the first Jew—a practicing Orthodox Jew, no less—ever chosen as a vice presidential candidate by a major American political party.

Disturbing signs of change began to appear early in the 21st century. The horrors of September 11, 2001, resulted in an unexpected surge of antisemitism. Although many at the time dismissed as extreme and marginal the claims that Jews and Israel had mysteriously received advanced warning about 9/11 or were secretly responsible for the attacks, we can recognize them today as a rehearsal for the tactics of inversion that would reappear with a vengeance after October 7. In the 22-year span between these two events, the shared script was to insist that Jewish power, rather than hatred of Jews, was to blame for mass violence.

This very familiar anti-Jewish energy continued to pick up steam unbeknownst to many, but not to all. As early as 2002, Harvard University's Jewish president, Larry Summers, warned of "disturbing evidence of an upturn in antisemitism globally and…closer to home." He saw germinating, likely on his own campus, what many others did not. Subsequent years saw waves of peaks and declines in antisemitic acts. But ever since the shouts of "Jews will not replace us" at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville and the massacre at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, things have only gotten worse. Today, practically every synagogue and Jewish institution in America has developed

or updated security procedures, locked its entrances, and quietly prepared for active-shooter threats such as the daylong hostage crisis at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, in 2022, or the truck ramming of Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan, in 2026. Instead of shocking the country into following a different direction, these and other antisemitic events have spawned admirers and would-be copycats.

The situation has not been without comedic relief or, perhaps more accurately, commentary. *Eretz Nehederet* (Hebrew for "A Wonderful Country"), Israel's version of *Saturday Night Live*, captured the current dynamic in a now-viral sketch featuring Jennifer, a bubbly American Jew, and Eli, a wizened secular Israeli, who run into each other at Ben-Gurion Airport, Jennifer immigrating and Eli emigrating. In braided dialogue, they thank their study of Jewish history for teaching them that "when it's time to leave…one morning you wake up and you realize it's not the same country you grew up in." Eli, apparently recalling the rockets that rained down on him in Israel, laments that "it's no longer safe for us to live here." Jennifer, referencing the New York City mayoral election, responds that where she lives is "not safe for Jews anymore." Each thinks the other is crazy.

Leaving Eli aside, the fascinating element for an American viewer is that Jennifer decides to immigrate to Israel because she feels unsafe in New York. Until the 21st century, American Jews generally made aliyah for religious, ideological, or economic reasons but rarely, if ever, out of fear. Israelis who did employ scare tactics to encourage aliyah (as a teacher of mine did years ago) were met with laughter and derision. Now, journalists regularly point to "concern about rising antisemitism" to explain why inquiries from American Jews about moving abroad have risen. The actual number of American immigrants remains small (about 3,500 in 2025), but the 80 percent rise in inquiries to Nefesh B'Nefesh, which supports aliyah efforts, buttresses the claim that the postwar era is over.

A brilliant cover story by Franklin Foer in *The Atlantic*, "The Golden Age of American Jews Is Ending," rings even more truth-

Growing numbers on the political Left and Right scorn concepts — including equal opportunity, merit, and cosmopolitanism — that Americans have long held dear.

fully today than it did when it was published two years ago. Surging antisemitism and anti-Zionism, Foer argues, reflect the collapse of the whole liberal order that made America attractive to postwar Jews in the first place. The "distinct strain of liberalism" that Jews espoused and helped to shape — one that combined defense of civil liberties, protection of minority rights (including the rights of Jews), and an ethos of pluralism — made that "Golden Age" possible. The belief that Judaism and Americanism reinforce each other, the two traditions converging in a common path (what I once called "the cult of synthesis in American Jewish life"), led Jews to believe that Jewish religious values and liberal American values were synonymous, while antisemitism and anti-black racism were dangerous and un-American.

Today, the end of American Jewry's Golden Age is likewise synonymous with the end of America's postwar liberal consensus. Growing numbers on the political Left and Right scorn concepts — including equal opportunity, merit, and cosmopolitanism — that Americans have long held dear. These emerging centers of gravity also look askance at the once venerated American and Jewish values of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and tolerance. On both sides of the spectrum, many fall prey to conspiracy theories that blame scapegoats — Israel, immigrants, colonial oppressors, Epstein, Soros, and, inevitably, Jews — for all of the nation's ills. Surging antisemitism and anti-Zionism,

America has long oscillated between periods of revolutionary change and eras of restoration that saw some of the change rolled back.

Foer reminds us, are symptoms of a society in danger. They reflect, he warns, "the decay of democratic habits, a leading indicator of rising authoritarianism."

Young Jews on college campuses feel the demise of the postwar era with particular intensity. While their parents and grandparents gloried in the new opportunities that the era opened up to them after discrimination in housing, education, employment, and leisure was outlawed, they themselves now confront overt discrimination from fellow students, biased faculty, or ideologically hostile diversity officers. Sympathetic as many of them are to increasing the opportunities for marginalized groups, they feel dismayed when they themselves are marginalized in the process and when people prejudiced against them are gaslighting them into thinking that antisemitism couldn't possibly happen in 21st-century America. It's as surreal as it is real. Academia has become the most pronounced site of what Jacob Savage has chronicled as "the erasure of Jews from American life," with the percentage of elite American academics under 30 who are Jewish dropping from about 21 percent back when I was hired to only 4 percent today. The number of Jewish editors at the *Harvard Law Review* declined by about 50 percent in a single decade. The percentage of self-identifying Jewish students at Harvard is actually lower, Savage reports, than in the dark days of the school's Jewish quota. (In the past decade, that percentage has declined by 50 percent.) Parallel declines have characterized many other Ivy League schools, with the honorable exceptions of Brown and

Dartmouth. Practically no Jews win MacArthur Fellowships anymore—something that, as recently as 2019, was utterly commonplace. Jewish-authored books have trouble finding publishers and winning book prizes. Young Jews have even been excluded from leadership within liberal organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union that their parents and grandparents helped to create.

Unsurprisingly, the end of the postwar era has alarmed many Jews. Some, like *Eretz Nehederet*'s Jennifer, ask themselves whether it is time to leave. History provides no shortage of examples to justify such concerns. Anyone who grew up with stories of relatives who left Europe "just in time"—or did not and "paid the price"—must at least be thinking about a contingency plan if their darkest fears come to pass.

America, however, is not Europe. And Jews are far from the only minority in the United States today to feel targeted and frightened. There are also numerous examples of persecuted Americans—Catholics, Mormons, and Chinese immigrants in the 19th century, German and Japanese immigrants in the 20th—who rebounded, experiencing new life and fresh vigor without having to pull up stakes and start life anew someplace else. One suspects that many of the Jews who support Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro for the 2028 Democratic presidential nomination see in him the promise of just such a rebound.

America has long oscillated between periods of revolutionary change and eras of restoration that saw some of the change rolled back. The American Revolution was followed, under John Adams, by the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Civil War and Reconstruction were partially reversed by the Redeemers and Jim Crow laws that worked against many equal rights and integrationist policies. Mass immigration and the celebration of immigrants were followed, after World War I, by cruel restrictions, the Prohibition amendment,

and Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's raids on "radicals," all of which looked to restore America, turning it back into the kind of society it had been in 1890, before mass immigration. Making America great again is something of an American pastime.

Significantly, every restorationist era in America's past subsequently gave way to the renewal of American freedom — most famously Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and the Great Society policies of Lyndon B. Johnson. Whether the future repeats history's cycle of two steps forward, one step back remains to be seen, but anyone looking to learn from history must keep that possibility in mind. As Martin Luther King Jr. liked to observe, echoing abolitionist preacher Theodore Parker, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

In the meantime, the Jewish community is understandably turning inward, "choosing continuity over social acceptance," as Mijal Bitton has recently put it in these pages. Key to this strategy, which she associates with the Sephardic tradition of the Middle East and North Africa, is also the energy radiating from "the surge," the so-called October 8 Jews who have turned or returned to Jewish life in response to the horrors of October 7. The young Jewish leaders waging today's fight against antisemitism at major universities; the Jews who have flocked to Jewish institutions over the past two years to align publicly with their own people; the unprecedented number of post–October 7 converts to Judaism, many of them Christian spouses of Jews who, in defiance of persecution, seek to embrace their partner's faith; the grassroots leaders battling antisemitism in workplaces, civic arenas, schools, higher education, and the cultural sphere and building new Jewish communities; the adult Jewish learners who throng courses about Jews and Israel; the parents who switch their children into Jewish day schools and summer camps; the college students who crowd into Hillel and Chabad houses; and the multitudes who have visited or plan to visit Israel since the hour of its tragedy — all show by their actions that Jews need

not be merely passive victims of antisemitism and discrimination. They can respond through a combination of Jewish pride, resilience, and defiance. Fostering "surging" Jews, history suggests, will prove more effective in the long term than fighting incorrigible enemies.

Turning inward and shoring up inner resources reflect Jewish muscle memory, recalling what Jews have successfully done during previous bouts of antisemitism. In the late 19th century, for example, anti-Jewish discrimination during the Gilded Age led young Jews such as Cyrus Adler and Henrietta Szold to establish great Jewish cultural projects and institutions, including the Jewish Publication Society, the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Hadassah. The result was the Jewish awakening that shaped 20th-century American Jewish life. Similarly, when antisemitism peaked again after World War I, a new generation of Jewish leaders established synagogue centers, Yeshiva College, Jewish educational camps, and Jewish day schools, among other important innovations, in response to quotas, restrictions, and the rantings of antisemites such as Henry Ford and Father Charles Coughlin. Will the current moment turn out to be another "great awakening" for American Jews? While it's too early to know, our actions will certainly make a big difference.

Now, as the postwar era in American Jewish history concludes and another movement of restoration begins in the country, accompanied yet again by antisemitism, a parallel opportunity awaits. If we nurture the current surge and tap into its energy, we can pave the way for a new, stronger era of American Jewish life, demonstrating afresh the paradox that those who seek to undermine Jewish life frequently stimulate its revitalization. ✳

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PART ONE

PATRIOTISM

ANNE NEUBERGER

The Jewish Case for Public Service

What our ancestors would give to give back to America

ON FRIDAY AFTERNOONS, as the sun descended, I would sign off from my U.S. government classified email at a secure facility and speed home to prepare for Shabbat. I closed my eyes and lit Shabbat candles, bringing a physical separation between the frantic pace of work at the National Security Agency (NSA) and the slow calm of what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel used to call the "sanctuary in time."

In those moments of stillness, I often reflected on the bridge I tried to walk between two worlds: that of religious faith and of high-stakes national security. Many assume that these worlds require mutually incompatible lifestyles, but for 20 years, I found them to be mutually reinforcing. Whether I was doing my part to combat the physical threats of ISIS or helping America in the

silent, invisible wars of cyberspace, my sense of spiritual purpose was ever present. Working as a religiously observant Jew in the White House, as well as leading global organizations and international coalitions to face threats that crossed national borders, gave my career constant spiritual resonance.

The ethos of public service—the quiet dedication of one's time to the service of one's country—is waning. College graduates flock to Silicon Valley and Wall Street, driven not just by compensation but by a cultural narrative that views government as sclerotic, polarized, or, worse, morally compromised. This leaves the country vulnerable, at risk of losing its next generation of public servants. We need these public servants, talented citizens devoted to the protection and welfare of their fellow countrymen and others around the world. To reverse this trend, we must revive a spirit of commitment to public service, starting in the Jewish community. For American Jews, public service is not just a civic necessity; it is a religious imperative born of *hakarat ha-tov*, literally translated as "recognizing the good," more colloquially, showing gratitude.

I am named for my great-grandmother, murdered in Auschwitz with most of her children and grandchildren sometime in the Spring of 1944. My maternal grandmother survived, with a number tattooed on her arm and a void in her heart. My father and his parents fled Soviet-occupied Budapest after the 1956 revolution, living as refugees in Vienna before coming to the United States.

In our home, America was not just a country; it was a *medina shel rachamim*, a place of mercy and refuge. My parents taught us that we owed a debt of gratitude to America for opening her doors when so many countries slammed them shut. On Shabbat, when we pray for the welfare of the government, it is not rote recitation for my family. It is a weekly recognition that the stability of this republic is the guarantor of our safety and our freedom to worship.

The prophet Jeremiah, writing to the exiles in Babylon two millennia ago, established how Jews would live for centuries as a dispersed Diaspora: "Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace shall you have peace" (Jeremiah 29:7). It was not a prophecy but an imperative, a charge to the generations of Diaspora Jews to take responsibility for the safety of the lands where they would find themselves. Today, seeking the peace of our city means ensuring that America's intelligence agencies can prevent the next 9/11 and that the next generation of drones, robots, and AI are integrated responsibly within our military. It means being in the Situation Room, wrestling with difficult choices to keep America and her allies safe. It means drafting executive orders outlining quantum strategy, or participating in innovative cyber-warfare efforts to bridge the intelligence and military communities and disable attackers' systems. It could also mean joining your city or state police force, national guard, coast guard, or any branch of the military. Rarely in Jewish history have there been so many ways to fulfill Jeremiah's words.

And even more rarely have there been governmental systems as responsive to and aware of Jewish religious needs. During a particular threat surge in 2018, I was the co-lead of a task force designing new tactics to blunt new threats. One Saturday night after Shabbat, I slipped into my office to catch up on classified email. There was a note from earlier that day sent by the director of the NSA to the director of the FBI, explaining that I would be delayed responding to his email because of my religious observance, confirming that nothing was needed until I was back online. And I, named for a woman who was murdered for practicing her faith, sat in my darkened office, unspeakably grateful.

The question is: Why are fewer and fewer American graduates of the country's most prestigious universities choosing public service?

When I speak with young graduates, Jewish or otherwise,

If talented young men and women cease going into public service, ceding those jobs to their potentially mediocre or more partisan peers, the machinery of our democracy will rust and our nation's security and safety will suffer. What we need is a revival of American public service, and that revival should begin in the Jewish community.

about their future, I hear a frequent refrain. They want to have an impact, and they question whether they can do so in government. They perceive government as a system strangled by bureaucracy, a place where ambition goes to die. Nothing could be further from the truth. For more than a decade at the NSA, I led thousands of soldiers, coders, cryptographers, and compliance officers who missed their children's soccer games to ensure that adversaries' plans were decoded and sailors on a remote mission were safe. The software engineers on my team were top-shelf talent. They could've worked anywhere—on Wall Street, say, developing algorithms to optimize trades and shareholder returns. Instead, they were at Fort Meade or Langley, developing algorithms to combat cryptocurrency money laundering, or to optimize border patrol or threat assessments to stop attacks like the one on Bondi Beach. They saved countless lives. At a hedge fund or investment firm, their impact would have been quantifiable. At the NSA or the CIA, it was incalculable.

The positive impact of good security work is by definition not

Tell your children where their family came from, why they came here, and how they can make this a better place for future arrivals following the same dream of freedom and opportunity.

perceivable. It is the absence of violence that citizens never knew was imminent. Misperceiving the quiet functioning of our society as *having no impact* is not only wrong but also dangerous because it shifts the mindset from personal responsibility to a self-fulfilling prophecy. If talented young men and women cease going into public service, ceding those jobs to their potentially mediocre or more partisan peers, the machinery of our democracy will rust and our nation's security and safety will suffer.

What we need is a revival of American public service, and that revival should begin in the Jewish community.

The reason it surprises people when I say that the two worlds I inhabit are easily bridgeable is that they don't realize how integrated those two worlds can be. My commitment—and that of many of my colleagues—to public service was rooted in the spiritual idea that each person has a divine mission that requires channeling her personal gifts toward the public good. For me, that was in the realm of security, but there are so many aspects of public service that have nothing to do with security: law, accounting, engineering, economics, you name it. When a visibly Jewish man negotiates a treaty with Indo-Pacific allies, it displays that same kind of spiritual

and religious integration. It sends the message that devotion to the country is part of one's devotion to Judaism. The American Jewish community should encourage our children to see a badge, a security clearance, or a civil service ID as a form of *kiddush Hashem*, a sanctification of God's name.

In the face of rising winds of antisemitism, some feel the pull to fold the tent and seek a safer shore, hearing only the echoes of past exiles. But we shouldn't let fear dictate our future. Instead of preparing to flee, let us double down on our devotion to this country. Rather than walking away, we should be investing our hearts, our intellects, and our labor into making this nation the sanctuary it was always meant to be. And every young person should be encouraged to think seriously about how he might best contribute to that sanctuary.

The Jewish community should create an Americorps-like program with tracks for individuals at various points in their careers, combined with study of Jewish texts on leadership and civic responsibility. Such a program could cover tuition for college students in high-demand fields in exchange for five years of government service. It could also include "tours of duty" that allow mid-career professionals to cycle in and out of government, bringing private-sector agility into public-sector missions.

All segments and generations of the Jewish community have a role to play in this revival.

To parents: Do not just encourage your children to be doctors, lawyers, or financiers. Encourage them to pursue those aspirations as servants of the public good. Be a doctor on an Army base, a lawyer in the Judge Advocate General's Corps or the Department of Justice, a financial analyst for the CIA. Tell your children where their family came from, why they came here, and how they can make this a better place for future arrivals following the same dream of freedom and opportunity.

To high schools: Teach the history of American virtue alongside the history of American vice. Teach about slavery and abolition

and the civil and civic wars fought for racial equality. Teach them about when America mobilized its might and treasure to free Europe from the hatred of Nazism, and Asia from Axis aggression. Teach them that the United States was and remains an indispensable nation, the only power capable of organizing the free world against authoritarianism. Teach about the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS relief (PEPFAR) under George W. Bush that saved millions of lives in Africa. Tell them they can be a part of these kinds of initiatives or even create new ones if they work in public service.

To rabbis and other spiritual leaders: Remind your congregants of the many examples of public service, from Don Isaac Abravanel, the 15th-century statesman and financial adviser to Spanish and Portuguese monarchs, to Adolphe Crémieux, the 19th-century French minister of justice who championed civil rights and the abolition of slavery. Remind them of Florence Prag Kahn, America's first Jewish congresswoman; Anna Rosenberg, former assistant secretary of defense who helped oversee the desegregation of the U.S. military, described by the *New York Times* as "one of the most influential women in the country's public affairs for a quarter of a century." Remind your community that these people's call to service stemmed from their Jewish heritage.

And to the youth: See all the good you can do for your country. Identify your strengths, your interests, your talents, and know how dearly you are needed by your country. You have a place to serve. You can make a difference by showing up, by saying, like Abraham did, *Hineni*, "Here I am." If not now, when?

Will there be periods of frustration and exhaustion? Yes. There were certainly moments when navigating and leading government bureaucracies, during challenge and change, proved difficult and tiresome. Did I question whether the long work hours were worth the time I was missing with my children when they were young? Yes. But I never had a moment of regret. There is a specific feeling you get when you walk out of the Eisenhower Executive Office

Building at night. You glance over at the Washington Monument, a beacon in the darkness, and you know that you've played a tiny part in holding up the sky. ✳

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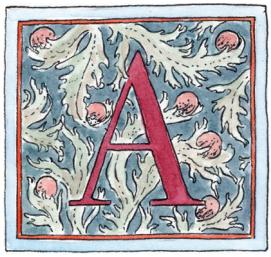
BRET STEPHENS

A Lesson in Resilience for America

Israel's example reminds us of who we once were



AS I WRITE, in April 2026, a shaky cease-fire has been declared in the war with Iran. In the United States, most Americans welcome the idea of an end to the fighting: They've grown tired of a conflict they think went on too long (five and a half weeks), cost too much (the price of oil rose as high as 15 percent above its 25-year, inflation-adjusted average), entailed too many sacrifices (13 American service members lost their lives in the war), and was waged for a cause that didn't justify the trouble (defanging and perhaps deposing the regime in Tehran, a sworn enemy of 47 years).

Israelis have a different reaction to the cease-fire. Support for continuing the war remains high, despite enduring a bom-

bardment of 650 ballistic missiles, the death of 20 civilians, and casualties in the hundreds. Prime Minister Netanyahu has come under attack from his political *left* for falling short of the victory he had promised. In the words of opposition leader Yair Lapid, "Netanyahu reached the worst result; the regime in Iran was not defeated." And not for lack of will. "Many Israelis would be willing to endure another six weeks — and more — of sleepless nights, school-less days, and hours in our safe rooms to bring about even part of our vision of regional peace," noted Michael Oren in a recent essay. "The tens of thousands of IDF reservists who have already served hundreds of days in combat will readily serve hundreds more."

Maybe it's to be expected that Israelis, for whom the threat from Iran and its proxies is immediate and existential, should be willing to sacrifice so much for the sake of prospective security. Maybe it's to be expected, too, that Americans see the threat from Iran as distant and notional, even among those who know that Tehran is responsible for the death of hundreds of U.S. citizens. That sense of distance is surely compounded by the bitter memory of two Mideast wars that cost thousands of American lives without delivering on their promises.

But there's something deeper at work. Israelis — by necessity, circumstance, and self-selection — largely tend to be tenacious, self-disciplined, resilient people. Americans — through good fortune and a penchant for ease and convenience — tend not to be. That is a long-term threat to America's safety and well-being. We could stand to take a lesson or two on it from our Israeli friends.

It wasn't all that long ago that Americans were raised on stories of resilience in the face of adversity. Washington's army at Valley Forge. The 20th Maine Infantry at Little Round Top. American POWs in the Hanoi Hilton. These and other landmarks in our

history testified to what Admiral John S. McCain, the late senator's father, described as a sense of "dedication which scorns vacillation and doubt." After the Marines took thousands of casualties during a botched landing at Tarawa atoll in World War II, the *New York Times* editorialized, "We must steel ourselves now to pay that price."

What was true of Americans in war was true also in peace. Depressions and recessions happened: We worked and scrimped through them. Natural disasters struck: We prayed for God's grace and endured them. When Americans heard recordings of Winston Churchill's speeches to Parliament, offering nothing but "blood, toil, tears, and sweat," it moved them to get involved in a foreign war. Our fictional heroes, in books or on screen, were tenderhearted on the inside but maintained a stoical demeanor. Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*; Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn in *The African Queen* — that was us, or at least what we aspired to be.

No longer.

Scores of books have been written about how that culture fell by the wayside. Reserve gave way to self-revelation. The old virtue of delaying gratification was replaced by the habit of demanding and getting it — immediately. Material plenty led to an expectation of physical comfort, which later morphed into a demand for emotional cossetting. The word *parent* went from noun to verb, from a role to an activity, infantilizing adults while coddling children. Safety became a legal requirement; risk-taking, a legal liability; "safetyism," a state of mind. The status of victim was valorized, and often monetized, at the expense of moral responsibility and personal agency. Ideas such as "microaggressions" and "unconscious bias" took hold; instead of trying to make our skins a little thicker, we discovered new ways to take offense. When things went poorly, we no longer asked, self-reproachingly, "Where did we go wrong?" Instead, we looked, conspiratorially, for a culprit: "Who did this to us?" And while fierce individualism has always been a part of

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These and other trends aren't the only things shaping American life today, and there is no shortage of opposing tendencies: of young men and women seeking challenge, not comfort; of open revolt against politically correct dogmas; of millions of Americans who have no interest in being the objects or beneficiaries of other people's pity; of millions more who have learned to live beyond themselves for the sake of other people and greater things.

Yet all that feels as if it is swimming upstream; that it belongs to a counterculture, not the dominant one. And the dominant culture inevitably has a shaping hand in political life and the policy choices that emerge from politics.

How, for instance, did we arrive at a $39 trillion national debt — nearly four times what it was (in inflation-adjusted dollars) just 30 years ago? Principally, because we have political leaders in both parties who cannot exact even modest sacrifices from the public — in terms of entitlement reform, or higher taxes, or more disciplined discretionary spending, or a genuine reinvention of government (unlike the three-month demolition derby conducted

under Elon Musk last year)—for the sake of our long-term fiscal health. How, too, have we repeatedly lost or abandoned wars against militarily inferior enemies in Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and now, possibly, Iran? Principally, because they have outlasted us: That is, they have made the bet that while we have the military and financial means, we lack the patience and the stomach for long and arduous fights.

These points do not go unnoticed in Tehran, which is why its remaining leaders seem to be convinced that they have the upper hand in negotiations with the United States. They do not go unnoticed in Beijing, either. China may not be able to match the United States in its overall military capabilities, at least not yet. But China's leaders are confident that they have a vastly higher tolerance for suffering than their American counterparts. How many casualties are Americans prepared to take, and how much economic pain are we willing to endure, for the sake of defending Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack?

To calculate the true balance of power, one also must account for the underlying balance of will. That's one area where America's non-resilient civilization falls dangerously, perhaps fatally, short.

Now turn to Israel.

Israeli resilience is proverbial—so much so that the idea of it is sometimes resented. "No country should be expected to live indefinitely in a state of managed danger," writes Joshua Hoffman in his excellent Substack newsletter, *Future of Jewish*. "When that reality is reframed as 'resilience,' something deeply dangerous happens: The abnormal begins to be framed or at least is expected to be normal."

Hoffman is right that what Israelis must endure just to live should not be normalized to the point of being forgotten. But resilience is a virtue, however one comes by it. And it's a mistake to ascribe Israeli resilience solely to the forms of adversity that it faces.

It also comes from the purposes for which the state was created in the first place.

Granted, most Israelis are toughened by the facts of their national life: conscription, service, *miluim*. They are toughened by proximity to neighbors they know who want them dead. By the wars they have fought, the friends they have lost, the children they must send to battle. By hundreds of trips to bomb shelters with family or with strangers. By knowing they can't set foot abroad without encountering an atmosphere of latent hostility and potential violence. By the internecine sociocultural and political battles that they are constantly waging within.

But tough isn't synonymous with resilient, which is about not only strength but also elasticity — the ability to bounce back after taking a blow. Why do people bounce back? Not just because they are capable of enduring pain. It's because they have something to live for: a goal that stretches endurance, ennobles suffering, and ignites the human spirit. I once heard a story about a man who, during one of the death marches in the early weeks of 1945, carried his young son on his shoulders for miles in the bitter cold. Years later, when the child asked his father how he had found the strength to carry him under such punishing conditions, his father replied, "It was you who carried me."

Israeli resilience is born of a similar spirit. The Jewish state makes no guarantee of a safe or easy life for its people. Compared with the United States, it offers a cramped, demanding, threatened existence. But it nonetheless honors a promise: that Jews may have political sovereignty, personal freedom, democratic institutions, the opportunity to live as their own people in their ancestral land, the means to safekeep ancient and modern memory, the chance to nurture their culture, speak an almost-forgotten language, openly practice a much-persecuted faith, and steer their own destiny. In short, not just the right to be authentically their fullest selves in both their individual and collective identities but also the pride that comes from defending that right for themselves and posterity.

Why do people bounce back? Not just because they are capable of enduring pain. It's because they have something to live for: a goal that stretches endurance, ennobles suffering, and ignites the human spirit.

I write this knowing that Israel is also a country of 10 million people groggily waking up each morning, sometimes after several trips to their safe rooms, trying to figure out how to get through the day. Political life is riven and societal disagreements bitter. And after close to three years of war, there's no good and clear end in sight.

Yet the fact remains: Israelis are prepared to fight, not only because they have enemies who mean them harm but also, and chiefly, because they believe they have something worth fighting for. That is simply not true elsewhere in the free world. A Gallup International poll from 2023—that is, more than a year after Russia invaded Ukraine—found that only 33 percent of Britons would be willing to fight for their country, as against 50 percent who would not. In Germany, the figures were 23 percent versus 57 percent; in Austria, 20 percent versus 62 percent; in Italy, 14 percent against 78 percent. As for the United States, a plurality, 41 percent, would still fight for their country, but a whopping 34 percent would not. The rest claim not to know.

The polling data here testify to something worse than innocence about what it takes to secure a free and prosperous life against determined enemies. It speaks to the thinning out of the West's civic concepts. What, in life, is worth fighting for beyond life itself?

Two or three generations ago, I don't think it would have been difficult to get a broad majority of people in democratic nations to rattle off a lengthy list: freedom at home and abroad; God and country; our way of life; our sacred honor and the national interest. Merely to mention that list today is to be struck by how fusty it all sounds, and how cynically we dismiss it. We aren't suckers for all that anymore, least of all those of us who consider ourselves sophisticated. Our preferred pronouns are "I/me," not "we/us."

Israelis aren't blessed with our conceits. And so they remain able to do things that the rest of the West, with the notable exception of Ukraine and the shaky one of the United States, no longer can: holding out, accepting risk, putting a greater good ahead of a personal one, living with constant anxiety and not-infrequent tragedy, loving their country, warts and all, and being willing to sacrifice for it in the face of daunting odds. For all this, years' worth of international survey data consistently show that Israelis are among the happiest people on earth — not because their lives aren't hard but because they are purposeful. They know who they are, what they're about, what they're up against, and, above all, what they are for.

These are the virtues that sustain a civilization in the long term. Wouldn't it be something if America could reclaim them for itself?

Doing so would require, first, a great unlearning.

We would have to unlearn a shallow and tendentious history of the United States, much of it courtesy of the late Howard Zinn, which has taught generations of students that our country is mainly the product of theft, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation — as opposed to a country that, like others, was born in sin but that, unlike others, has consistently uplifted itself thanks to its foundational promises and has done immeasurably more good than harm for its people and the world.

We would have to unlearn the insipid belief that America is an

exceptional nation only in our own minds — that, as Barack Obama once put it, "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." Among other differences, neither Britain nor Greece nor any other country was founded in the declared conviction that all men are created equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights.

We would have to unlearn the cynical notion, prevalent in MAGA circles, that America has no higher interest than self-interest — that our ideals count for nothing against our material needs or commercial advantages. Among the ways America is different from other countries is that we aren't in this just for ourselves; that the admiration we engender has something to do with our strength but has much more to do with the strength of our ideals.

Along with the unlearning would have to come a relearning.

That the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts with the idea of founding a new Jerusalem, modeled on the example of the old, central to which was the Mosaic injunction: "Choose life." That the *novus ordo seclorum* — the "new order of the ages," tied to the date 1776 — marked an unprecedented transformation in global politics: from particularism to universalism and from regimes based in hereditary privilege to those based in equality and individual rights. That the "new birth of freedom" that Lincoln spoke of at Gettysburg was won at an immense cost in lives, and that the cost was and remains worth the prize. That the abundance of American life emerges not through the coerced redistribution of preexisting wealth but because a rule of law that respects private property and profit allows creative minds to take risks and create value where it did not previously exist. That in 2026 America is still the only country that goes to the moon, and that it does so for the reasons John F. Kennedy spelled out in 1962: "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because the challenge is

one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win."

None of this means that Americans can afford to forget or downplay the evils of our past. It does mean that we desperately need to reacquaint ourselves with the nobility of our ideals and the heroism it took to uphold them. In doing so, we might be able to fall in love with America all over again, to know why it's worth fighting for, to recover the ability to rise above ourselves in its service.

Finally, we could stand to learn something from Israel.

That isn't much in evidence today. On the contrary, polling data show that more Americans are souring on the Jewish state. It would be easy to read that as a bad omen for Israelis, and perhaps it is. But it would be much wiser to see it as a warning sign about us—about our diminished capacity for critical thinking and moral reasoning. How have we in the United States managed to confuse perpetrator and victim in this war? When did we lose the capacity to use the word *terrorist*? Why have we so easily fallen for the baldest and most blatantly dishonest Palestinian propaganda? Why are we so beguiled by conspiracy theories plainly rooted in antisemitism? And since when do we malign an immensely capable and brave ally that fights by our side?

Most important, how do we fail to see in Israel a model of what a democratic people, which for 78 years has been battling for survival while still managing to thrive, can be capable of achieving through self-belief and the ability to recover its strength after taking blow after blow? Americans cannot hope to regain our old resilience unless we know what resilient looks like. The sooner we learn from the Israelis, the faster we might save ourselves from what, increasingly, we risk becoming. ✳

April 19, 2026

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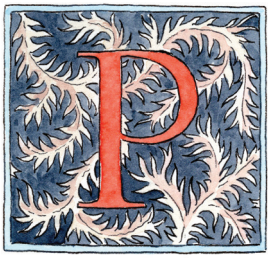
ELIOT A. COHEN

The Illusion of Realism

Why idealism is necessary in American foreign policy



POLITICAL SCIENTISTS have a great many things to answer for, and one of them is the supposed chasm between ideals and realism in American foreign policy. This hardy dualism best suits minds that swing on hinges. It is a doctrine without nuance or subtlety. It's also false and dangerous.

The notion that ideals (democracy, self-government, and more) are fundamentally opposed to realism in foreign policy (the balance of power, "hard" interests such as military bases or oil concessions, indifference to values) emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. In the United States, the case for so-called realism was advanced with particular effect and considerable subtlety by two Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, Hans Morgenthau

and Henry Kissinger, both of whom viewed Americans as generally naïve about the hard realities of the world. They were far more nuanced in articulating these views than those who followed them.

Ironically, perhaps, some of the foremost advocates of academic realism in recent years — John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt among them — became some of the most savage critics of American support for Israel. Their theories of how international politics work did not account for the partnership between Washington and Jerusalem, so they resorted to conspiracy theories about an all-powerful Israel lobby to explain it. Nor did they see a connection between Israel's extraordinarily outsized military capacity and the kind of society it has, leading them to the absurdity of wishing to weaken the American relationship with the most powerful state in the Middle East.

In any event, the notion of a distinction and more, a profound incompatibility, between American ideals and a realistic foreign policy has taken root among academics and political commentators. Like most dichotomies, it fails to hold up against the mirror of history. John Quincy Adams, often celebrated by academic realists, did indeed say in his famous July 4, 1821, oration that the United States "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy." But he also said, in the same speech, that the Declaration of Independence represented "the only legitimate foundation of civil government…the cornerstone of a new fabric, destined to cover the surface of the globe." American values, Adams expected, would eventually shape the order of the world.

Woodrow Wilson, supposedly the most foolishly idealistic of American presidents, had a determinedly realistic side: He dispatched the U.S. Marines to Veracruz, Mexico, in 1914 to intervene in a civil war and sent General John J. Pershing's cavalry

into Mexico in 1916 to suppress raids across the border. In January 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his "Four Freedoms" speech articulated freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom of fear as the objectives for which the United States would engage in Europe's affairs and, ultimately, her wars. But he also squeezed Great Britain out of imperial trade preference and got the U.K.'s most valuable bases in the Western Hemisphere in exchange for giving them 50 obsolete destroyers. George W. Bush's administration spoke the language of democracy and liberation in launching the second war with Iraq in 2003. But the choice for war was equally motivated by fear of a reconstituted Iraqi nuclear program and the collapse of a sanctions regime that had contained the ambitions of the exceedingly dangerous Saddam Hussein.

In the real world, ideals and interests mingle. The United States is a country like others: It has national interests of a very traditional type and has been brutal in its conquests and avaricious in its ambitions. Think of the invasion of Canada in the War of 1812, the invasion of Mexico in 1846, or the Indian Wars throughout the 19th century.

At the same time, it is also a country *unlike* others in that it is founded not upon ethno-national identity but on the principles of the Declaration of Independence: that all people are created equal, that they have inalienable natural rights, and that these include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Immersion in profound ideological beliefs shapes how political leaders understand and interpret the world and also how they act in it. Seventy-four years of Bolshevik dictatorship and Communist ideology still affect how Vladimir Putin thinks and behaves. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a much longer quarter-millenium of commitment to American notions of liberty and democracy affects the most unsentimental of American statesmen. Which explains why even the Nixon and Ford administrations, with Henry Kissinger as secretary of state, negotiated the Helsinki Accords, which turned human

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rights in the Soviet Union into a subject of national interest.

The idealistic component of American foreign policy has shifted in tone and emphasis from time to time. Idealism includes commitment to the rule of law, individual liberties (particularly those enumerated in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights), and open economies. Since World War II, it has included free trade and some form of democratic governance.

The ideals-heavy component of American conflicts emerged chiefly in the 20th century. The Civil War, the greatest of American wars, it might be argued, was waged internally between two democracies. But it must be remembered that one of the sides in that conflict advocated — and was willing to launch a war in defense of — chattel slavery.

Beginning in the 20th century, if not earlier, however, America's deepest historical enmities and wars have been directed chiefly against various forms of dictatorship or revolutionary regimes hostile to individual rights. World War I and II, Korea, Vietnam, the Iraq War, and more have been fought primarily against regimes that were not merely dictatorships but also egregious violators of basic rights. The same is true for the protracted irregular war against Islamists such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, and for the cold wars with the USSR and, later, China.

Values articulated well are a powerful tool of foreign policy. The Voice of America, the democracy institutes affiliated with the Republican and Democratic Parties, and nongovernmental organizations such as Freedom House were all important sources of power aimed at weakening American adversaries during the Cold War.

One of the unfortunate consequences of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the first decades of this century has been the definition of values in foreign policy chiefly in terms of democracy, or rather its most elementary form: elections. The Bush administration to some extent succumbed to this focus on voting rather than the deeper and more important values—rule of law and a reasonable commitment to liberty—that constitute ideals in foreign policy. Still, it is no coincidence that the American war in Iraq, like that in Korea two generations earlier, led to rough-and-ready forms of representative government years later. To the extent that human rights agitation in the West and Eastern Europe helped dissolve the legitimacy and power of Communist dictatorship in the 1980s, it was law and liberty, rather than elections, that carried the day. It is harder to manipulate or fake real rule of law and individual freedom of conscience and speech than it is to rig elections.

Academic realism is highly unrealistic in its undervaluation of

ideas, because values articulated well are a powerful tool of foreign policy. The Voice of America, the democracy institutes affiliated with the Republican and Democratic Parties, and nongovernmental organizations such as Freedom House were all important sources of power aimed at weakening American adversaries during the Cold War. It is one of the mistakes of the current American administration that it disdains such organizations.

What passes for realism is highly unrealistic in another way: It assumes that American relations with states that despise American values can be the same as our relations with liberal states. As was the case with Nazi Germany in the 1930s, the Communist bloc throughout the Cold War, and Russia and China today, regimes that have no scruples about the rule of law can and will use propaganda and subversion to do their best to undermine American self-confidence and norms of self-governance. Such undermining from without is nothing new: The United States faced just such a challenge in the 1790s from revolutionary France.

The notion that a country's foreign policy is unrelated to its domestic politics is similarly a conceit of some contemporary political scientists, and it's equally untrue. While some dictatorships have been status quo powers — think Portugal and Spain under Salazar and Franco — the more modern kinds of dictatorship have sought to upend the international order. Revolutionaries at home, the Communists, the Nazis, and the revolutionaries of both the secular Ba'ath party of Iraq and the Khomeinist movement in Iran sought to transform the international order as well as the domestic one.

To a remarkable extent, international relations still depend on some level of trust that agreements will be adhered to and that peaceful means of resolving disputes will be preferred to violent ones. But for regimes like those mentioned above, there can be no trust: Necessarily built on lies and bad faith domestically, they have no compunction about lies and bad faith externally. And having far fewer restraints on violent coercion at home, they are more likely to resort to it abroad.

Today, America's chief opponents — enemies in some cases — are the dictatorships of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea as well as violent Islamist movements such as ISIS. Its most important allies — its NATO partners, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Israel, among others — are liberal democracies in some form or other. This is no coincidence. Even with the Trump-era disruption, the United States continues to have more in common with countries that share our values than those that do not.

It is a very Jewish synthesis of idealism and realism — the written and oral law treat extensively the key problems of international politics and most notably war. There are obligatory wars and voluntary ones, but the rules are different. The Bible prohibits excessive destruction (the uprooting of fruit trees, for example) and attempts to moderate by various restrictions the horrors of rape that followed the sacking of a city in ancient times. The prophets — Jeremiah above all — warned of placing foolish hopes on various foreign powers, and we are told that the greatest of Jewish kings, David, was not allowed to build the Temple because his hands were soiled with blood. The rabbis attempted to temper the messianic fervor of those who wished to revolt against Rome, and they insisted that some nations were off-limits for conquest. But the theory of Jewish kingship remained one of doing what one had to do to survive in a hard world.

The catastrophe of World War II turned the thinking of many Jewish intellectuals in the United States, native-born and immigrant alike, to problems of foreign policy, as they embarked on or returned to careers in academe, journalism, or government. They knew, perhaps none better, that it was a tough world that required prudence to navigate. They also knew that the values for which the United States stood were indispensable to preserve our national interests, including our fundamental character as a free society.

They knew that Jews could never be cold-blooded realists, much though they might sometimes wish to be so; and they knew that in a world without values, they, more than any other group, would be exposed to terrible things.

Correct then. Correct now. ✳

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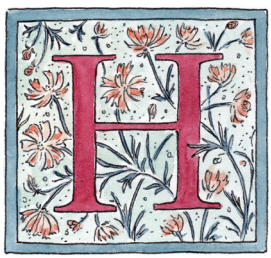
ALLEN C. GUELZO

A Return to Teaching History

How ignorance of the past endangers us all



ISTORY was not supposed to be America's long suit. The Founding Fathers prided themselves on the historically unprecedented nature and radicalism of their revolution. And in the century that followed, our greatest national poet, Walt Whitman, celebrated pioneers who cheerfully sing

> All the past we leave behind,
> We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world;
> Fresh and strong the world we seize…

History has grown even less central to our imaginations in the 21st century, as the focus of American education has, over the past 150 years, shifted away from the formation of citizens to the training of employees. In elementary and secondary education, history

has been increasingly squeezed out by demands for more math, science, and language arts teaching. Partly this is the by-product of good intentions and unintended consequences. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was supposed to provide federal heft for improving primary- and secondary-school learning; what it produced, however, was a drop in the instructional time spent on history, music, and civics in more than 70 percent of the nation's 15,000 school districts, in favor of a frenzied focus on boosting math and reading scores. By 2014, the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that only 18 percent of American middle schoolers could be considered "proficient" in American history; by 2022, it had sunk to 13 percent. Several years ago, I quizzed one of my classes at Gettysburg College about their high school history textbooks. Half of them hadn't had one. The other half—literally half—had been issued Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, which reduces that history to a series of simple binaries of "slaveowner against slave, landlord against tenant, corporation against worker, rich against poor."

No wonder, then, that from 2011 to 2017, the number of history majors in American colleges and universities has declined by a staggering 33 percent. According to Benjamin Schmidt, who analyzed this decline for the American Historical Association in 2018, "Students and their parents seem to be thinking a lot more that they need to major in something practical," and "history, humanities, English, and philosophy are not those practical majors." And they are not entirely wrong. The number of college and university history-teaching positions advertised on the academic job site H-Net collapsed from a high of 742 in 2007 to just 285 in 2023, with only 61 of those positions being open to new-career historians of the United States. Nor is the future of history likely to improve. Today's undergraduates have lived all their educational lives on keyboards and screens, and I have had to deal with more and more students whom I cannot send to the archives to do research because, quite simply, they cannot read cursive.

There is a price to be paid for this. History is the meta-narrative; everything in human experience and knowledge has a history, and without knowledge of that history, we are condemned to a constant recovery from the starting line, as though we were Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*. The impulse to wonder about the past and cast it into a narrative is as old and deep as the cave paintings of Lascaux and as recent as last night's documentary. And history presides over more even than narrative: whether it's Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* paintings, Shakespeare's plays, or Verdi's *Aida*, history has been the informer of all the other arts.

But looming up behind all of these in importance is the sense of identity that history imparts to individuals and societies. The historical declaration "My father was a wandering Aramean" was the first statement of Jewish identity (in Deuteronomy 26:5), and it is no accident that these words appear in the central portion of the Passover Haggadah, a text designed to shape identity through the recitation of historical narrative. The experience of the past forms our present; who we *were* shapes who we are. Saint Paul tried the same narrative technique, exhorting the first generation of Christians to connect their history to that of the Jews:

> For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food. (1 Corinthians 10:1–3)

And so Cicero regarding the Roman republic: "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child," scoffed the great lawyer. "For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?"

The impulse to wonder about the past and cast it into a narrative is as old and deep as the cave paintings of Lascaux and as recent as last night's documentary.

If you want to measure how much is lost by the neglect of history, whether in teaching or writing, ask those who have suffered under persecution. For Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the erasure of history is the first strategy of tyrants, who know that wiping out the past gives the oppressed no means of comparison to a better time or place, no ground on which to resist in the present. "A people which no longer remembers has lost its history and its soul," Solzhenitsyn said in 1976. "To fight for our memory, for our memory of what things were like — that is the task of the artist." That fight was the task to which Solzhenitsyn applied himself in *The Gulag Archipelago*, and it is worth noticing that 15 years later, the Soviet tyranny collapsed.

The dictators understand this, and they tremble. Much as every despot has come to power promising better future worlds of various sorts, the totalitarians really look first to control and manipulate history. The great Czech novelist Milan Kundera saw this in the Eastern European Soviet bloc. "They shout that they want to shape a better future, but it's not true," Kundera objected. The autocrats "want to be masters of the future only for the power to change the past." This is why "the first step in liquidating a people . . . is to erase its memory," Kundera (like Solzhenitsyn) insisted. "Destroy its books, its culture, its history, then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster."

So why, then, do we run so carelessly the risks of ignoring history? First, we should say the obvious: Taking care of the past, as the task of historians, is not easy. There is, after all, so much of it, and no single person can hope to be master of more than comparatively small slivers. Even within those slivers, the work of archival research and the parsing out of patterns require a persistence and a wisdom that are sufficient to exhaust a lifetime. No one who aspires to do the work of history should embark on it with anything less than the wildest and most preoccupied form of love, or with what one of my old teachers, Theophilus John Herter, called *sitzfleisch*, by which he meant the capacity to sit for interminable lengths of time in archives and libraries, turning over one page after another.

Second, and almost as obvious, are the contradictory returns one is likely to gain from the evidence. The moment one rises above the simplest historical statements — as in, "The United States entered World War I during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson" — tension and debate begin to animate the presentation. Still more contradiction is liable to emerge as new and unanticipated sources of information surface, not unlike the discovery provided in November 1998, by DNA testing, that Thomas Jefferson had probably fathered at least one (and probably all) of the six children borne by Sally Hemings, or the revelations from the old Soviet archives indicating that embarrassingly well-placed Americans in the 1950s had spied for the Soviets.

But there are some particular difficulties in the path of writing and teaching American history. The first of these has already been alluded to: that the American Republic is (as the Great Seal of the United States proclaims) a *novus ordo seclorum*, a new order of the ages and consequently was meant to be a fresh start for human history that renders all pasts irrelevant to Americans. This futurism may be what the French Revolution and many subsequent revolutions since then have believed about themselves and what that talented propagandist for the American Revolution, Thomas

Paine, believed when he wrote in 1776 that we Americans "have it in our power to begin the world over again." But the architects of the American Revolution did not propose doing away with *all* pasts. They wanted to be rid of the world of false hierarchies that had grown up for centuries around the necks of European nations, in the same way that Galileo and Newton had rid Europe's intellectual world of the false hierarchies of Aristotelian physics in favor of the natural physics of astronomy and gravity. But their experiment was *novus* because, like Galileo's and Newton's, it dared to "recur to the first principles" of governance, which is why the American revolutionaries industriously dusted off Polybius, Plutarch, Thucydides, Vergil, Cicero, and Xenophon as though passing an exam in classics. And Thomas Jefferson, observed the revolutionary leader James Duane, was "the greatest rubber off of dust" that he had met with.

Nor was the generation of the American Founders shy about requiring the teaching of the Revolution's history to succeeding generations. It was critical to them that the earliest school textbooks be filled with a "number of stories, mostly taken from the history of America, and adorned with ... a short and easy explanation of the Constitution of the United States" in which "the great principles of liberty, and of the federal government, are laid down and explained." Seventy years later, the Swiss traveler Georges Fisch was impressed by how "the schools of the North are centres of the most intense patriotism. Children are taught songs that excite their young heads and fire their young hearts."

But there is another difficulty in cultivating a permanent respect for history in American minds, and that is the weakness our imagination has for conspiracy theories. The American Revolution was an experiment in government from the bottom up, without hierarchies and aristocrats, and this has fostered the sense in American minds that we are an exceptional people. This is not entirely unfounded: "We have as a people no past and very little present, but a boundless and glorious future," said Frederick

The American Revolution was an experiment in government from the bottom up, without hierarchies and aristocrats, and this has fostered the sense in American minds that we are an exceptional people.

Douglass, himself once a slave, but who devoutly believed that American mobility and self-transformation were without a copy anywhere else in the world. But there is a difference between being exceptional *within* history and imagining that we are an exception *from* history and can make it up from whatever point seems convenient. The Confederacy, for instance, invented a history around race and soil, but it was really little more than an accusation that one-half of the American nation had conspired against it. The Confederates were, if anything, obsessed with conspiracy, since they imagined a slave insurrection around every corner and tried to erase that terror by confecting the fairy tale of the happy and contented slave.

But in their conspiracy concoction, the Confederates were, in a strange way, taking part in an American pastime. There was more than a little whiff of conspiracy in Jefferson's Declaration, where (once we move past the majestic two-paragraph opening of political philosophy) Britain's imperial tax gatherers are depicted as running a conspiracy against the colonies' customary liberties:

> The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

Of its 1,331 words, no fewer than 706 constitute an accusatory history of grievance, perhaps the most successful such text in the history of the world. It was through narrating its history on its own terms that America created itself, and once in place, the conspiracy-hunting habit became endemic in American imaginations. Mercy Otis Warren's 1805 history of the Revolution accused the Federalists of "a conspiracy" to re-plant "hereditary distinctions and noble orders" in America, and ever since, Americans have been uncovering conspiratorial explanations of American and human life, from Ford's Theatre and Dealey Plaza all the way to *The Matrix*.

The appeal of conspiracy theories in America has some important roots in our break with the aristocratic past. For all their indignities, aristocracies often serve as a bridge to the past and a reminder that the past contains few real novelties, much less mysteries. In America, absent such a check, any answer to the questions of the past becomes as good as another, whether rational or merely impulsive. Conspiracy theories offer their adherents the thrill of a special knowledge of how things came to be, a secret gnosis that none but initiates enjoy and that explains everything (a sure sign that, like a plastic decoder ring, it explains nothing). Conspiracy masquerades as explanation, whether of the past or present; its ambition is to replace history. Even when it purports to deal with history, it substitutes for the complexity of history the all-or-nothing "Eureka!" of sensational plot construction. Narrative becomes melodrama, suspicion, accusation, indictment.

Unlike some conspiracy theories, antisemitism refuses to take the form of a harmless eccentricity. After all, the intensity with which a handful have insisted that John Wilkes Booth was the agent of a conspiracy led by Edwin M. Stanton to murder Lincoln and that he escaped capture to live out a life incognito in Oklahoma

(or Texas, take your pick) has not noticeably affected American foreign policy or the price of eggs. Antisemitism is another matter, and its resurgence of late in the United States should not be mischaracterized, as Pamela Nadell's *Antisemitism: An American Tradition* makes clear, as having emerged ex nihilo. "Colonists not only carried rucksacks to America. They carried ideas about Jewish enmity and degeneracy that dwell at the core of Western civilization," she writes. "The first Jews to land in New Amsterdam in 1654 faced them head on." Three and a half centuries later, it springs up again like some noxious, self-multiplying weed. On the political Right, the so-called Christian nationalists wish to believe that the United States was founded by self-conscious Christians to be a self-consciously Christian republic, only to have that identity spirited away by piratical secularists, globalists, and you-know-who.

But the political Left has had its own share of conspiracy theories over the years, making money madness, class madness, race madness, and other madnesses — often with a Star of David woven into the infographic or cartoon — the sole and secret drivers of American history. Christian nationalists would have us adopt domestic policies that would make one religion the standard of civic virtue, while the Left would make the same demand for some favorite quasi-religion as well. No one, and least of all myself, has any wish to dismiss the importance of religion or money or class or race in American life. (That would require yet another conspiracy theory). But 250 years and a population of 300-plus million people do not resolve themselves into such quick reductive formulas, or along such simple and uncomplicated lines. The conspiracy-mongers lack, in other words, *sitzfleisch*.

Good history, with all its complexity and self-contradiction, all its many voices and desires, inoculates us against conspiracy theories; it invites reason to mount the bench of judgement and holds off panic and fear that some kind of heretofore unsuspected catastrophe is about to be visited on us. It is an intellectual

guardrail against rage and vindictiveness; it inculcates humility in the face of both human accomplishment and human depravity. Good history doesn't sing a single song, and it doesn't claim to have discerned a "right side" that others must be blind or wicked for not seeing.

As Americans move into the Semiquincentennial of their independent republic, it might be worth taking the advice of an English contemporary of the Revolution, Samuel Johnson, who, in his 1759 philosophical novel *Rasselas*, wrote: "There is no part of history so generally useful as that which relates the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, the successive advances of science…and the revolutions of the intellectual world."

This is worth listening to because we do a great wrong to the victims of oppression and theft—and who among us is silly enough to pretend that there are no such victims in the American story?—by producing for this 250th anniversary the kind of "nationalist" soap operas in which all the brothers have been valiant and all the sisters virtuous. Americans should confess the shortcomings of our history as full parts of our identity, and for good and ill. The irony of much of our "new" history, which purports to discover unseen webs of oppression and exploitation, is that it simplistically ignores how we have always known about those webs, always exposed them, always struggled to tear them down. It was not yesterday but 1842 when Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, much like Frederick Douglass, warned

There is a poor, blind Samson in this land,
  Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel,
Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand,
  And shake the pillars of this Commonweal,
Till the vast Temple of our liberties
A shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish lies.

At the same time, while you cannot tell fictions of purity and expect them to carry the weight of historical fact, you also cannot tell fictions of unrelenting gloom without delivering a demoralized people into the hands of the world's tormentors. No one has loved stories of American failure more than those who feared what American success might do to their demented dreams of power.

Alongside the ups and downs, and mixed into both the surprising equalities and the depressing inequalities, Americans should entertain a particular curiosity for America's ideas and for its extraordinary but simple improvements in the day-to-day living conditions of its people. As a fit subject for Semiquincentennial inquiry, begin with the "intellectual world" that Johnson spoke of. Josiah Royce, America's most needlessly neglected philosopher, insisted that in America, "wherever you go, you find the typical American sensitive to ideas, curious about doctrines…disposed to plan great things for his country and for his community, proud of both, jealous of their honor, and discontented with the life that now is." It is about time we took that estimate seriously and flung away the Whitmanesque notion that Americans are only interested in the bottom line.

Move then to the "improvement" that Johnson thought so vital to a "useful" history. In this 250th year of our being, it might be worth glancing through Robert Gordon's epic *The Rise and Fall of American Growth* (2016) or Robert William Fogel's *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700–2100* (2004) to marvel that in little more than a single generation, Americans leapt from a still-medieval reliance on candles and muscle power to the telegraph, the steamboat, and the railroad; that not a single American home was wired for electricity in 1880, but 100 percent of them were by 1940; that 37 percent of American deaths in 1900 were due to infectious diseases, but only 5 percent by 1955; that all the hard-surface roads in America in 1900 would have stretched only from New York City to Boston. In the long run of human affairs, these are accomplishments that almost beggar description.

Even the short end of the American stick is a position that other nations and societies over the centuries could have beheld only with envy. This is a history worth telling at the Semiquincentennial, and especially telling to each other—a history built around great ideas and great improvements but that has been served by frail human beings who have not always loved greatness as they should but who at least embody that greatness. In the words of Auden,

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise. ✳

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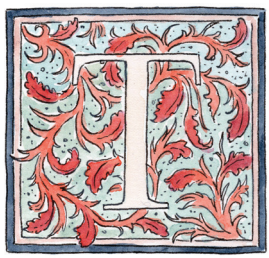
PART TWO

POLITICS

DAVID BERNSTEIN

The Center Can Hold

How Jews can rebuild a middle-ground politics



THE political contest in America today is not merely between Left and Right. The United States is going through a profound political realignment, and the political center is the great casualty of the upheaval. Loud voices and well-organized activists on the ideological fringes have reshaped the incentives of political and civic life, and their baited meddling has eroded the political center. The institutions, norms, and coalitions that once rewarded moderation, compromise, and cross-partisan cooperation have steadily weakened under this pressure. The result is a political ecosystem that amplifies extremes while marginalizing the broad middle.

This transformation is the predictable result of several reinforcing forces: Gerrymandered districts with supermajorities of one-party voters reward candidates who appeal to ideological

passions rather than mainstream sensibilities; social media platforms elevate outrage, speed, and moral certainty over deliberation; emboldened activist networks proliferate on both the Left and Right. Candidates must now move so far toward their party's fringes to win primaries that they can no longer credibly pivot back to the middle to compete for moderate voters, further amplifying the most extreme voices.

The result is a political culture in which moderation is treated as weakness, compromise as betrayal, and nuance as moral confusion, the perfect societal conditions for increasing antisemitism. Most Americans do not share these attitudes. As of early 2026, 45 percent of Americans identify as political independents, a new high, with slightly more of them leaning Democrat than Republican. But today's politically homeless lack the organizations, institutions, networks, and strategies to translate their preferences into power in a way that transcends these obstacles. In short, what is needed is the politicization of the independent middle. And for American Jews, this is not just a civic but an existential concern.

Political scientists often define the center as the midpoint of public opinion, where the median voter resides. This is not quite right. The center is not a point on a graph. Most Americans, even today with the high number of political independents, identify with one of the two major political parties. On many concrete policy questions, that center is defined not by rigid ideology but by a blend of instincts. On immigration, for example, large majorities of Americans say immigration is good for the country, roughly two-thirds support a path to legal status, and yet many of those same voters also favor stronger border enforcement and reject permissive approaches. This "both/and" pattern — combining order and openness, rights and limits — appears in issues and reflects a more nuanced public than our polarized politics suggest.

The center can also be understood as a set of people, coalitions, and norms capable of sustaining pluralism. It includes citizens and leaders who may disagree on policy but who remain willing to engage despite differences, deliberate in good faith, and operate with a shared commitment to democratic rules. The political center, then, is not simply equidistant from the Right and the Left; it is the combination of both/and thinking and the civic capacity to translate that thinking into cooperation and governance.

American Jews have flourished in a system defined by liberal democratic norms: constitutional protections, equal citizenship, religious liberty, and a culture of pluralism. Our security has never depended on numerical strength but rather on the strength of the system itself.

On parts of the progressive Left, ideological frameworks divide society into rigid categories of oppressor and oppressed, often casting Jews — and especially Israel — the embodiment of unjust power. On parts of the populist Right, conspiracy thinking, nativism, and illiberal impulses are no longer confined to the margins but are increasingly shaping party agendas and political behavior.

These are different phenomena with different origins. But both flourish in environments where the center is weak. In such an environment, Jews become vulnerable, not only to explicit antisemitism but also to the erosion of the civic framework that has historically protected Jewish life. This is why the Jewish response cannot be limited to fighting antisemitism alone. What we are facing is more than a rise in hostility; it's a weakening of the whole system that has made American Jewish life possible. We cannot litigate our way out of a political culture that incentivizes polarization, and we cannot rely on existing institutions if those institutions themselves are being reshaped by illiberal forces. The appropriate response is therefore not defensive but constructive. American Jews must take on a new mission: rebuilding the political center of American society.

This is not a call for more dialogue across differences, valuable as those efforts may be, or an appeal to civility. It is a call to build power.

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Many of the underlying drivers of polarization, such as gerrymandering and social media, are deeply entrenched and unlikely to be easily reversed. The task, then, is not to wish them away but to identify and activate other pressure points in the system that can help restore centrist norms and incentives. Rebuilding the center will require sustained investment in multiple domains. Several strategic priorities, however, stand out.

1 | *Re-anchor American civic values*

At the heart of any functioning center is a shared civic framework. American Jews are uniquely positioned to champion values that transcend partisan divides: constitutional democracy, pluralism, equality under the law, free expression, and individual rights. These are not "right-wing" or "left-wing" values. They are the preconditions that allow a diverse society to function. In recent years, these principles have often been treated as abstractions or even as ideological positions themselves. They must instead be reclaimed as the common ground on which American life depends. Jewish institutions — communal organizations, philanthropies, educational initiatives — should play a leading role in re-centering these values in public discourse. Major Jewish organizations, in all of their work, should lead the way by articulating a robust American-pluralism narrative, both patriotic and self-critical. When I worked at the American Jewish Committee beginning in the late 1990s, the organization took out regular full-page ads in the *New*

York Times featuring notable members of the Jewish community describing "What America Means to Me." The old civic-pluralism narrative is the compact that enabled a golden era of Jewish thriving. If we don't reclaim and give voice to it, who will?

2 | *Build political capacity at the local level*

As the Jewish community exercised influence on the national stage for the past couple of decades, disciplined activist networks took root locally and then entrenched themselves. Political power in America is built from the ground up on school boards, in city councils, in state legislatures, and within party machinery. What was cultivated in those local spaces inevitably moved upstream, reshaping the tone and trajectory of national politics. Local politicians have become national and international political celebrities.

Rebuilding the political center requires setting foundations from the ground up, competing in local contests by organizing moderates, recruiting candidates, and building durable local coalitions. The Jewish community needs to establish an array of national, state, and local 501(c)(4)s and other political funding vehicles that allow us and normie Americans more broadly to regain our footing in American politics.

There are emerging models for this work. Efforts such as the Commonground Collective in Chicago, a 501(c)(4) organization, illustrate how cross-partisan, values-based organizing can shape local governance and counteract ideological capture. The collective was formed by leaders in the mainstream Jewish community in the wake of Brandon Johnson's election as mayor, a moment that crystallized the community's realization that they had lost meaningful influence in local politics and risked being sidelined altogether. The collective has focused on shared commitments—educational excellence, institutional neutrality, and accountability—while investing in candidate recruitment, coalition-building, and year-round participation in local governance. It successfully supported

several winning candidates against their progressive opponents in the recent primary elections in Illinois. This success offers a replicable model — now embraced in New York City, Seattle, and Pittsburgh — for how moderates can reassert themselves through organized, persistent civic action. There must be formal networking between these local organizations as well so they can share resources, learn best and worst practices from one another's experiences, and drive proliferation in other locales.

3 | *Strengthen cross-partisan leadership networks*

One of the most significant losses in American political life has been the erosion of relationships across ideological lines that once made compromise possible, particularly in the U.S. Congress. In earlier eras, lawmakers, civic leaders, and institutional actors maintained personal and professional ties that enabled cooperation even amid deep disagreement.

Rebuilding the center requires intentional investment in cross-partisan leadership-development programs that bring together leaders from different political backgrounds, foster trust, and create channels for collaboration. Nancy Jacobson, the founder of No Labels, has long championed this approach and is currently working with members of Congress from both parties to build a new coalition of centrist lawmakers working on centrist policies. These networks need not produce agreement on every issue. Their purpose is to ensure that cooperation remains possible and that moderates can act collectively when it matters most. American Jews should get behind such efforts and help catalyze others at every level of government.

4 | *Rebuild the academic and intellectual center*

Universities have long played a central role in shaping the intellectual culture of the country. Today, disciplines in the humanities

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and social sciences are dominated by ideological frameworks that crowd out alternative perspectives. Predictably, the impact is evident far beyond academia. Ideas developed in universities flow into media, policy, philanthropy, and education systems.

As Tao Tan has observed, the humanities are often shaped by relatively small pools of funding. Entire subfields, journals, and faculty pipelines can be shaped with investments in the low tens of millions. A small academic center can operate on $1–3 million annually. A coordinated $25–50 million philanthropic strategy, deployed over time, can materially shift hiring, research agendas, and the training of future scholars.

One very positive development is the movement to create civics centers and schools of civic thought, often within existing universities across the country; it's creating institutional homes for scholars committed to intellectual pluralism and open inquiry. These centers provide a viable career path for less ideological or more heterodox academics, and they're a magnet for students seeking serious engagement with foundational texts and competing schools of thought. These centers are slowly rebuilding an intellectual infrastructure that can cultivate viewpoint diversity over the long term.

American Jewish philanthropy, in partnership with others, should invest in expanding this ecosystem, supporting centers and programs

and developing pipelines for scholars committed to open inquiry, methodological rigor, and pluralistic debate. This is not about imposing a counter-ideology. It is about restoring the conditions in which knowledge can be pursued without political orthodoxy.

5 | *Build new coalitions*

The Jewish community has remained too fixed on maintaining coalitions with progressive activist groups and the legacy civil rights establishment, much of which has grown increasingly ideological in recent years. That paradigm proved badly wanting in the wake of October 7 when many Jews confronted a painful reality: Long-standing partners were either silent, equivocal, or openly hostile, particularly on issues related to Israel and, at times, American Jewish life itself.

Rebuilding the center will require breaking out of that pattern and developing new, values-based coalitions rooted in shared commitments to American civic values rather than historical alignment alone. While this effort must extend to many sectors, K–12 education offers a particularly important opportunity. Across the country, parents from diverse backgrounds — Jewish, black, Latin, Asian, and others — are increasingly worried about declining academic standards, politicized curricula, and the erosion of shared civic norms. Jewish organizations should work in partnership with these emerging activists to build broad coalitions committed to educational integrity, strong academics, viewpoint diversity, and respect for all students.

To be sure, these networks are still nascent and far less developed than the well-established civil rights infrastructure. At this stage, the work is necessarily person-to-person rather than organization-to-organization. But that is precisely how durable coalitions begin. American Jews must bring the same energy and creativity that once helped catalyze the early civil rights movement, investing in new relationships and helping to knit together a coalition of

the center, committed to American civic values, capable of shaping the future.

6 | *Confront extremism where it takes institutional form*

Finally, rebuilding the center requires a willingness to confront extremism when it captures institutions. This does not mean policing individual beliefs but rather recognizing when ideological agendas undermine the core purposes of institutions—whether in education, civic organizations, or public agencies—and using available levers to restore balance.

The Jewish community will not thrive where radical activists are in charge of setting the educational agenda. In 2024, the Toronto District School Board moved to formally recognize "anti-Palestinian racism" (or "APR") as a distinct form of discrimination, and it began integrating it into its broader antiracism strategy, with plans to embed it in training, curriculum, and reporting systems. In the APR framework, it's racist to question the Palestinian narrative of the Nakba. How can Jewish life sustain itself in metropolitan areas that embrace such policies? Avoiding these conflicts may feel prudent. In reality, it cedes ground to actors who are more organized and more willing to exercise power. The Jewish community must do everything possible to neutralize and remove extremists from positions of power by exposing them in the media and leveraging existing relationships with elected officials.

Rebuilding the political center will not be quick or easy. It will require patience, resources, and sustained leadership. It will involve setbacks and internal disagreements. But the alternative is clear. If current trends continue, American politics will become increasingly polarized, institutions increasingly politicized, and

civic trust increasingly fragile. In such an environment, Jews face growing risks that may make the current tumultuous environment seem calm and secure.

We cannot afford to be passive observers of this civic meltdown. The task before us is not simply to defend against rising antisemitism and extremism. It is to build the conditions in which extremism cannot dominate. That means organizing the center by giving it voice, structure, and power. For American Jews, this is both a strategic necessity and a moral calling. We have done this kind of work before. We can do it again. ✳

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ROGER ZAKHEIM

Saving Conservatism from Nationalism

America is not like other countries, and shouldn't try to be

N THE LEAD-UP to the Trump administration's military strike against Iran's nuclear weapons program in June 2025, Tucker Carlson posted on social media that "anyone advocating for conflict with Iran is not an ally of the United States, but an enemy." It was a nonsensical assertion considering that the two countries had then been in conflict for 46 years and also obtuse considering that Iran has placed that conflict at the center of its political messaging since 1979. When the first Ayatollah came to power, he did so amid chants of "death to America!," holding Americans in Iran hostage for 444 days. Neither the chants nor the violent anti-American actions to back them have abated since.

The primary targets of Carlson's rhetoric last year weren't his usual opponents on the political Left who attribute to him, at least in part, the rise of their least favorite president ever. No, that day and throughout the military confrontation that followed, Carlson's attack was directed at other Republicans. In case you haven't noticed, while the Democratic Party has been roiled by internal power struggles between its left flank and its more moderate center, the Republican Party has been undergoing an internal ideological battle of its own, between traditional conservatives and neoconservatives (neocons) on one side and the new national conservatives (natcons) on the other.

The natcons are an intellectual movement aligned with MAGA conservatives who have long rejected the GOP's Reaganite conservative internationalism, strong national defense, free markets, and limited government. They favor a "restrained" foreign policy, largely oppose military intervention overseas, and embrace protectionist economic policies. Tucker Carlson was an early adopter of foreign policy positions after a 2003 trip to Iraq that would, a decade and a half later, come to be regarded as pillars of national conservatism in America. "Seeing Iraq up close was a formative change in my thinking," he said. His complete shift toward national conservatism in the years since has reflected a broader trend in the conservative movement and also affirmed his position at the movement's helm. Watching the transformation of the rural town in Maine where he lives into "something different and diminished, not just poor but degraded"—thanks to the effects of drugs, alcohol, unemployment, welfare, and illegitimacy—cemented Carlson's conversion to full natcon-hood. By 2019, Michael Anton, a founding leader of the natcons and a veteran of the first Trump administration (and now the second), declared Carlson the "de facto leader of the conservative movement."

The future of American conservatism hinges on whether national conservatism will continue to outpace its ideological predecessors: traditional conservatism, neoconservatism, and Reaganism. At

present, it is attracting a young and energetic following and getting far more of the podcast airtime. And when it comes to policy positions, there is not a single one more contested in this battle over the future of conservatism than U.S. support for Israel, with the traditional conservatives and neocons holding a firm "yea," but a growing number of influential natcons, including Carlson, pushing "nay." What makes this most ironic is where national conservatism began: Israel.

The origins of national conservatism reside with the right-wing Zionist political theorist Yoram Hazony. A former aide to Benjamin Netanyahu in the 1990s, Hazony retreated from the world of Israeli politics to embark on an intellectual project dedicated to legitimating the Jewish state. The problem facing Israel, as he and many conservatives saw it then, was not Israel's external enemies but the threat from within. A new generation of Israeli elites had come to reject Herzl's Zionism in favor of a secular liberalism that saw Israel as a civic state like other liberal democracies and de-emphasized the country's Jewish character. Hazony's book *The Jewish State* (2000), titled as a nod to Herzl, argued that Israelis should once again embrace the essence of Zionism: a Jewish nation committed to its history, religion, and culture. If Israeli leaders in the Knesset did not believe in Israel's right to exist as a Jewish nation-state, how could Israel expect to be received seriously in the United Nations General Assembly?

By 2018, Hazony had transformed his work on behalf of Zionism into support of a larger cause. The liberal disease undermining Israel, Hazony concluded, was afflicting all Western nation-states. Liberalism had run amok and threatened the Westphalian nation-state system that was built to protect and preserve the freedom and culture of nations. Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism*, published that year, became a core text for conservatives across the

The tragic irony is that as Hazony's natcons have helped catalyze nationalism in the West, his original goal of legitimating the Zionist state has backfired.

world. *The New English Review* called it "the book many conservative readers in the West have been waiting for." The book launched national conservatism as an international movement, and 2018 was the year Hazony's theory of nationalism, first formulated specifically for Israel, went abroad.

In Hazony's mind, saving nationalism everywhere would rescue Zionism. In attempting to legitimize the Zionist state, he intended to build a global movement that advanced nationalism. Much of the thinking that has come to define the natcon movement today, most notably its Statement of Principles in 2022, can be traced to Hazony's early work seeking to restore the soul of Israel.

The tragic irony is that as Hazony's natcons have helped catalyze nationalism in the West, his original goal of legitimating the Zionist state has backfired.

The nationalist strand promoted by natcons is inspired by biblical Israel. Natcons emphasize its strong nationalist identity bound by a common religion, language, culture, and history — a non-expansionist nation that was content to remain within its borders. For natcons, empires are the antithesis of nationalism: Rome in ancient times and supranational bodies, such as the United Nations and the European Union, today. According to natcons, liberalism of the late-20th and early-21st centuries seeks to subvert and replace national identities with a godless, globalist, woke ideology. It advances open borders and concentrates

The greatest weakness of national conservatism's creed is its disregard for the excesses and dangers of nationalism, most notably Nazism.

power in unaccountable elites disconnected from their fellow citizens. In the natcon view, the autocrat, dictator, or monarch dedicated to protecting the realm is a lesser evil than woke liberalism, which would undermine the foundations of the nation's existence.

It's not hard to see how natcons are the natural intellectual companions of MAGA Republicans. Natcons believe that unrestrained liberalism in the United States delivered a globalism that undermined American sovereignty by rejecting its founding (see The 1619 Project) and its Judeo-Christian creed while embracing open borders, wokeness, and supranational bodies. Post–Cold War liberalism harnessed American power and wealth to preserve a faceless "rules-based international order" that led to "forever wars." It embraced free-trade policies that favored multinational corporations over American manufacturing jobs and indulged "free riding" allies — most notably NATO. If this sounds like the politics of Vice President JD Vance, it is: Vance is one of a number of younger GOP politicians who have embraced national conservatism.

Hazony has argued urgently for America's embrace of his project, as he explicitly said in his 2022 book, *Conservatism: A Rediscovery*: "In fact, with the collapse of liberal hegemony in America, nationalist conservatism offers the best hope for restoration of political stability and health."

Applying nationalism to the United States, whether it is of a Russian, Chinese, Hungarian, or Zionist variety, is a tricky and somewhat fraught exercise. While natcons draw inspiration from the books of Joshua and Judges, and from Samuel's description of how the 12 tribes settled ancient Israel, they downplay the part of the Bible that most inspired America's Founding Fathers. Franklin, Washington, and Adams drew from the book of Exodus; America's revolutionaries saw themselves as a second Israel escaping the bondage of their contemporary Egypt, the British Crown. The liberty enshrined in America's Declaration of Independence was inspired by the story of ancient Israel's independence, *not* the resettlement of its homeland.

Unlike other nations, ancient Israel and America were built on a shared set of values and beliefs before they had common borders. While the natcons emphasize the sovereignty of free nations, America's founding was dedicated to the preeminence of free peoples. For the Founders, the power and authority of government was drawn from "We the People," not "We the Colonies." In the mold of ancient Israel at Mt. Sinai, the American people made a covenant committing to a set of ideals and a specific form of government enshrined in its Declaration and Constitution. This was the essence of American nationalism. As Ronald Reagan reminded Americans in his last speech as president:

> I think it's fitting to leave one final thought, an observation about a country which I love. It was stated best in a letter I received not long ago. A man wrote me and said: "You can go to live in France, but you cannot become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Turkey or Japan, but you cannot become a German, a Turk, or a Japanese. But anyone, from any corner of the Earth, can come to live in America and become an American."

Like the Founders before him, Reagan understood that the American creed made American nationalism exceptional. It distinguished it from all other nations. The American democratic republic, according to Reaganites, traditional conservatives, and neocons, is not one nation among many but a chosen nation, chosen not by God but by its own citizens.

The battle over American conservatism is fundamentally the same battle that these dueling versions of American nationalism, drawn from two different facets of biblical Israel, are fighting. To put it in more Trump-era terms, the battle over MAGA is a battle over what makes America great. Is it the same thing that makes any nation worth its salt? Or is it something different, unique to the American experiment? Where the conservative movement decides to stand on this question will inform the role and purpose of the American project at home and abroad.

Historically speaking, it's plain to see the fact of America's difference from the other (mostly European) countries where national conservatism has found a foothold. But there is also a more philosophical argument against natcon's importation to American politics. The greatest weakness of national conservatism's creed is its disregard for the excesses and dangers of nationalism, most notably Nazism. In the natcon view, the racism, expansionism, and genocide of the Nazi era were a bug, not a feature, of nationalism. The natcon statement of principles condemns "the use of state and private institutions to discriminate" and promotes a "decent nationalism" that protects minorities. For Reaganites, reliance on "decency" is an entirely inadequate defense against tyranny and fails to learn the lessons of the 20th century.

On the 40th anniversary of D-Day, in 1984, Ronald Reagan reminded Americans, "There is a profound, moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest." From the beaches of Normandy, Reagan ushered in a new American epoch in the middle of the Cold War. He believed that

The exceptionalism of the American democratic experiment is what distinguishes the United States from every European state—and the natcons' mistake amounts to a fundamental repudiation of the American idea.

after two world wars and during a struggle with a nuclear-armed totalitarian regime, perpetuating the American Republic necessitated a United States that advanced freedom beyond its sovereign borders. To preserve American liberty within the United States, Reagan believed, America would have to project its creed across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans: "Isolationism never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments with an expansionist intent." Reagan warned against the impulse "to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost."

This is the heart of Reagan's conservative internationalism. It embraces morality in foreign policy by advancing individual freedom and aligning with democracies. As America entered its third century after its birth, Reagan advanced the spirit of the Founding globally, the exact opposite of what American natcons endeavor to do today, which is to bring the spirit of European nationalism to America. Reagan's vision was attractive to Democrat and Republican Cold Warriors alike. His policy was rooted in the politics of addition—building a durable bipartisan coalition with a noble vision of America's place in the world. He succeeded. America defeated the Soviet Union, won the Cold War, and ushered in an unprecedented era of American peace and prosperity, liberating

half of Europe in the process. It also defined the outlook of a generation of conservatives.

For today's natcons, many of whom were praising Reagan not long ago, Reaganism's promotion of liberal idealism corrupted conservatism because it allowed the excesses of liberalism to penetrate the conservative movement. The reckoning is a recent phenomenon, one made possible more by America's response to direct attacks on its soil than by the idealism and sense of purpose underlying the American story. To be sure, a critique of the conservative project after the Cold War is warranted—for our post-9/11 wars and our passive responses to the "Great Awokening." Where natcons go too far is recasting our identity in the image of Old World nations whose citizens fled to America. The exceptionalism of the American democratic experiment is what distinguishes the United States from every European state—and the natcons' mistake amounts to a fundamental repudiation of the American idea.

Thus, when the Trump administration deliberated in the spring of 2025 and then again in the winter of 2026 on whether it should join Israel in striking Iran, natcons found themselves divided. For pro-Israel natcons such as Hazony, a U.S. strike against Iran was an acceptable form of American intervention, though it might strain or contradict the principles of the movement. But his acolytes, natcon purists uncommitted to the Jewish nationalism for which the project was forged, viewed Operations Midnight Hammer and Epic Fury as an abandonment of the movement's core beliefs: restraint and suspicion of interventionism. Carlson and other anti-Zionists went a step further, using natcon ideas to sow suspicion of Jews, true to Old World form. Suddenly, it seemed that Hazony had created a monster. The nationalist project he championed, all but invented, to protect the Zionist project was now being used as a sword against it.

For his own part, Hazony has failed to acknowledge what he has wrought and has not even seen the connection between his project and Carlson's crusade. "On February 3, Tucker wrote to me asking if he could speak at the first Israeli National Conservatism Conference (NatCon), which is scheduled to be held in Jerusalem on June 8-10. I was taken aback that he would ask for something like that, given the content of our conversation two days earlier," Hazony posted on X on February 21, 2026. In that conversation, Hazony had been trying to explain to America's foremost surrogate of national conservatism why so many Jews view him as antisemitic, to no avail.

With conservatives like these, who needs Marxists?

But things might not be as gloomy as they seem. For all the natcon podcastery bluster and social media theater, committed MAGA Republican voters, including the president, appear not to be buying what the natcons are selling, at least when it comes to foreign policy. President Trump's interventions in Iran, Venezuela, Syria, and Nigeria, and his focus on resolving conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, demonstrate that the founder of MAGA is not an isolationist who favors the natcon doctrine of restraint. While not necessarily driven by a Reaganesque commitment to freedom and liberty, the president clearly sees America's special role in the world as instrumental for serving America's interests.

And his base is with him. Recent polls show support for Operation Epic Fury among more than 90 percent of MAGA voters, which only reinforces the polls that consistently show that MAGA Republicans overwhelmingly favor the United States being engaged in the world. Elsewhere, by contrast, national conservatism has taken several high-profile hits, most notably Viktor Orbán's loss to a center-Right opponent in Hungary. As Ukraine continues to withstand Russian aggression, in defiance

of the yearslong natcon predictions of defeat, it appears that the sun might be setting on the political promise of national conservatism, both at home and abroad.

Traditional conservatives should turn these successes into a program of action.

First, they need to count and communicate these wins as wins. The conceit advanced by the mainstream media and far-Right podcasters is that the defanged and denuded Islamic Republic has won the fight against the United States and Israel. This not only gives aid and comfort to the enemy; it perpetuates the natcon narrative that foreign interventions against tyranny weaken American security and sovereignty.

Second, traditional Republicans (that is, conservatives, neoconservatives, and Reaganites alike) need to engage elected Republicans at the state and federal level on the fissure between MAGA Republicans and natcons. While natcons host their conference in Jerusalem in June, attempting to repair a movement riddled with antisemitism, traditional Republicans should work in the United States to engage grassroots conservative confabs like CPAC and to have a presence at Turning Point USA events. Some, such as Ben Shapiro, have already done this to great effect. The traditional conservatives must, as Theodore Roosevelt urged a century ago, remain in the arena and challenge the natcons who keep trying to grab the microphone.

Last, and certainly not least, traditional Republicans need to prioritize running traditional candidates in local elections.

On February 22, 1861, Abraham Lincoln addressed Independence Hall in Philadelphia, the birthplace of our nation. Drawing from Proverbs 25:11 — "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" — he likened the Declaration of Independence to an "apple of gold," and the Constitution was the "setting of silver." The apple of gold, the heart of the Republic, was protected by its silver setting. Conserving both the golden apple and silver setting has been the principal preoccupation of Republicans since

Lincoln's presidency. The question of how best to conserve them is at the heart of the fight within the American Right today. The national conservatives have their own theory, but to me they are treating the gold apple like all others. The task before traditional conservatives is to present a hopeful, regenerative vision, calling on Americans to shoulder the responsibilities of liberty at home and abroad rather than retreat into grievance, cynicism, and self-endangering restraint. ✳

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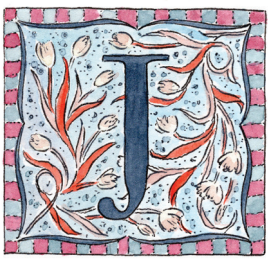
YASCHA MOUNK

Censorship Won't Help the Jews

Or anyone else



EWISH AMERICANS have historically been among the most principled defenders of free speech. When a group of neo-Nazis planned to march through Skokie, Illinois, home to many Holocaust survivors, it was a Jewish attorney who stood up for their right of assembly. David Goldberger, then the legal director of the ACLU of Illinois, was no self-hating Jew, and he certainly harbored no sympathy for the National Socialist Party of America. But he realized that "the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and press would be meaningless if the government could pick and choose the persons to whom they apply."

Goldberger's position might read as the credo of a universalist Jew who prioritizes abstract principles over the interests of his group. But there was a deeper and less self-abnegating logic to his

position. Like me, Goldberger was convinced that these universal principles are in the long-term interest of all ethnic and religious minorities, including Jews.

Minorities often have good reasons to feel threatened. One understandable response to this feeling is to look to the powerful for protection. But whenever you look to the powerful for protection, you become dependent on their whims.

This is a story that the Jews of the Old World knew all too well. For a few decades, they would thrive under some tolerant monarch who gave them relative freedom to go about their lives with relatively little harassment. But when that monarch changed his mind, or was succeeded by a less tolerant heir, all those precious liberties would evaporate quickly. In fact, that pattern is literally as old as the Old Testament: As Exodus 1:8 notes, "A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph," setting off the chain of events that led to the enslavement (and eventual liberation) of the Israelites. American Jews have historically put their trust in a less precarious promise: that of constitutional principles that deprive the powerful of their ability to play favorites — even if the price consisted of neo-Nazis holding speeches in a community of Holocaust survivors.

This preference for free speech has been sorely tested over the past years. Social media has brought the poison of antisemitism, largely relegated to the fringes of public debate in the second half of the 20th century, into much wider circulation. Some of the people with the largest followings on social media — Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, Hasan Piker, and Jackson Hinkle, among others — now delight their audiences with a litany of antisemitic tropes. Hateful ideas, whether coy insinuations that the Jews have once again grown too powerful or outright conspiracy theories painting Jews as the dark forces behind just about every tragedy or social failure, are now being streamed to millions on TikTok, YouTube, and other platforms.

Tragically, the rise of detestable speech has coincided with a steep increase in physical violence against Jews, from the deadly

shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018 to the vehicular attack on a synagogue in West Bloomfield, Michigan, earlier this year. I have come to consider the rise of physical violence against Jewish communities around the country, and its psychological impact, as the Europeanization of American Jewry. When, as a teenager growing up in Germany, I first visited America, I was struck by how little protection Jewish institutions needed in the New World; now, it is nearly as easy to spot a Jewish kindergarten in New York as it long has been in Paris or Berlin: Both are marked by the presence of security guards. Back then, I marvelled at how much less beleaguered Jews in America seemed to feel; now, the same unceasing sense of fear and vigilance is taking hold of Jewish life in the United States.

It is little wonder that a growing number of Jews are desperate for any form of protection, and even that more and more are willing to discard their long-held commitment to free speech in exchange for promises that things might somehow go back to normal. And as it happens, Jews are hardly alone in responding to the rise of social media with a desire to censor its contents: Many Gentiles are now similarly tempted to drain the poison out of our politics by embracing new forms of censorship. As many politicians and political commentators are quick to claim, the principal reason for the scary times we are now living through is the omnipresence of "misinformation." If only we could find the right way to "regulate" social media, they say, things would finally go back to normal.

I understand the temptation. If it were possible to preserve all the advantages of new communication technologies, which make access to information easy and painless, while banishing from the public sphere all the narcissistic influencers and psychopathic politicians using these tools to advance their own interests, the offer

Whenever you look to the powerful for protection, you become dependent on their whims.

would be compelling. But I worry that the world they imagine simply doesn't exist.

Let us imagine, for the sake of argument, that we become sufficiently convinced of the unsustainability of the current situation that we are willing to "creatively reinterpret" the First Amendment. One question to ask is whether the trade-off would be worthwhile: Would we want a manicured public sphere that hands the powerful the ability to enforce their own views even if it did drain some of the poison of antisemitism? But thinking of this choice as a trade-off presumes that the promised outcome, the establishment of a more sane and rational public sphere, would actually materialize. And I very much doubt that it would.

The case for believing that such regulations of social media would bring about a better public sphere rests on three tacit premises:

1. The people who make decisions about what speech is allowed and what speech is verboten will be reasonable and rational.

2. The reasonable and rational people who make such decisions will be able to enforce their preferences without making the censored content more popular than it was before.

3. Bad ideas have flourished in recent years because we lack appropriate regulation, and increasing regulation can therefore eradicate such ideas.

The first assumption is that the people who are empowered to make decisions about what should or should not be censored will in fact make good decisions. At a time when mainstream

We have plenty of evidence to suggest that — unless repression is, as in some dictatorships, extremely severe and wide-ranging — attempts at censorship usually fail.

institutions were thoroughly shaped by a stable political consensus based on a number of broadly shared ideals, such an idealized view of the world might have been warranted. But America today is more polarized than it has been at any point in recent memory. Those who disseminate points of view that, until a few years ago, would have been considered disqualifyingly extreme are no longer on the margins; they hold the reins of formal political power and enjoy some of the biggest platforms anybody could wish for. Under these circumstances, it is deeply naïve to think it would be a good idea to let the government pick and choose who enjoys the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

The smartest case for free speech has never turned on denying that some utterances are so vile that all of us would be better off if they somehow disappeared from the public sphere. Rather, it was always based on skepticism that any institution, private or public, would consistently make these determinations in a reasonable and selfless manner. The growing influence of extreme views and the immense power that extreme political movements now hold should be a reason to double down on, not discard, that insight.

The second assumption is that attempts to censor speech are likely to succeed in discrediting terrible ideas. There is some superficial plausibility to this. While it is always important to pay attention to how political actions might backfire, the presumption

should be that, most of the time, political actors aren't so ignorant or incompetent that they'll harm their own cause.

But in the case of free speech, we have plenty of evidence to suggest that — unless repression is, as in some dictatorships, extremely severe and wide-ranging — attempts at censorship usually fail. The appeal of the forbidden fruit is so strong that many of the most successful idea entrepreneurs often portray themselves as censored even when, by any objective standard, they are not. Indeed, it is sometimes hard to know what accounts for the success of some of today's most vile media personalities if not for this appeal; a substantial portion of the audience for people such as Nick Fuentes are as attracted to the frisson they derive from breaking the biggest possible taboos as they are to the actual claims that Fuentes is making.

Both the idea that we can trust the would-be censors and the idea that their efforts would be effective are downstream from the third key assumption: the belief that institutional changes, rather than technological realities, stand at the root of the problem.

There may have been a time when the structure of mass communication made it possible to keep certain ideas from broad circulation. Reaching a mass audience used to require enormous financial investments as well as the cooperation of a large number of highly trained professionals. In that era, an ethos widely shared between journalists and the owners of big television networks could, porously and imperfectly, restrict the scope of public debate.

But those days are long gone. Nowadays, the costs of production and dissemination are negligible. Anybody can put together a near-professional studio in his own home for a few hundred dollars. The ability to reach a mass audience has been radically democratized. Established media outlets, while still influential, have lost their capacity to gatekeep. Today, a single episode of the *Joe Rogan Experience* draws far more viewers than the nightly audiences of CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News combined.

These technological changes are the real cause of our transformed public sphere. Attempts to turn back the clock by introducing strict regulations are unlikely to rein in the conspiracy theories that have so quickly proliferated on social media. Indeed, many countries in Europe have all along had in place the kinds of guardrails fervently desired by those Americans who wish to curtail the First Amendment. They criminalize all kinds of political speech, from denial of the Holocaust to anything that might be thought liable to incite hatred. They routinely compel social media platforms to delete any posts that could even remotely be considered illegal. Countries such as the United Kingdom have arrested thousands of people for violating these rules every year.

And yet, none of these practices have marginalized the extremists or restored the placid discourse of an earlier era. Jews are no safer in Europe than they are in America. And while extremists still remain in the opposition in most countries in Western Europe, polls suggest that they may be only one election away from storming the gates of power. The reason should, by now, be obvious: The problem is not political but structural. The nature of communication in the age of social media has allowed previously fringe ideas to flood the mainstream. Short of the extreme censorship practiced by some of the world's most repressive dictatorships, regulation can't bring back the past.

None of this is to say that all forms of regulation are in principle unwise. There are some strong reasons for (as well as some real reasons against) banning the use of social media for children, for example. And I have long believed that those social media companies that effectively do act like publishers, by favoring some content on the basis of the views expressed, should also be treated as such—which would make them much more liable for the content they amplify. But any attempt to regulate social media must conform with the letter and the spirit of the First Amendment.

It isn't hard to see why many Jewish leaders and organizations have lately grown less supportive of free speech. But anyone who

gives in to these understandable temptations neglects a crucial historical lesson: Any power that can arbitrarily grant us rights (such as being protected from the offensive chants of antisemites) can just as arbitrarily deprive us of those same rights (such as decreeing that advocacy in support of our own causes and concerns constitutes offensive speech that must be silenced).

Jews have historically thrived in free societies that grant rights to all of their members without regard to the groups into which they happen to be born. Free speech is among the most fundamental of these rights. Jews must remain among its most ardent defenders. ✳

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YAACOV AYISH & MARK FOX

What the Pentagon Can Learn from the IDF

Trading structure for speed

FOR YEARS, military doctrine in the United States and Israel rested on a powerful but flawed assumption: that clear superiority of arms would deter conflict or, failing that, bring wars to a swift and successful conclusion. The wars of this century have invalidated that belief. From Afghanistan to Iraq, Ukraine to Yemen, and Gaza to Lebanon, contemporary conflict has become more drawn-out, more fast-paced, more fragmented, and more technologically diffuse. Precision weapons and unmanned systems are proliferating. Warning times are shorter. Deterrence, while still desirable, cannot rest on military superiority alone.

Over the past two years, Israel has confronted this emerging reality directly, often on multiple fronts at once. It has been

forced to operate in an environment where superiority is temporary, mobilization is immediate, and adaptation cannot wait for postwar analysis. Training, doctrine, and operational practice are tightly linked through feedback loops, on not only fast recovery from colossal failure but also how quickly the impact of initial success diminishes. Lessons learned on one front are absorbed and applied elsewhere in near-real time. The emphasis is on relevance rather than perfection.

For the United States — whose defense institutions, though still unmatched in scale, often struggle with speed — learning from the Israeli experience is particularly important as strategic competition with China intensifies.

China's rise as a military and technological competitor to the United States has reshaped the global strategic environment. Beijing is investing heavily in artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, space capabilities, quantum technologies, and military-civil fusion, deliberately shortening the distance between commercial innovation and battlefield deployment. This approach challenges a core American advantage: the assumption that technological leadership, once achieved, can be maintained through scale and spending alone.

The risk for the United States is not that it will fall behind overnight but that its innovation and procurement cycles will move more slowly than those of China. Large platforms such as Ford-class aircraft carriers, exquisite systems such as the F-35 jet, and lengthy acquisition timelines (the first vessel of the new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines is expected to take more than 10 years to build) were designed for an era of strategic dominance and early warning. They are ill-suited to an era of persistent competition, rapid iteration, and consistently contested domains.

In this context, preserving America's technological edge is less

about inventing the next breakthrough technology or building the next best-in-class weapon system and more about institutionalizing faster learning, experimentation, and adaptation. This is where Israel's recent experience and its defense-innovation ecosystem become strategically relevant.

Israel's culture of defense innovation is shaped not by abundance but by constraint and necessity. Limited manpower, finite budgets, and existential stakes have produced an ecosystem that prizes modularity, rapid prototyping, and operational relevance. Engineers, operators, and commanders work in close proximity. Technologies are stress-tested in real conditions and refined continuously. The Iron Dome missile defense system, to take just one example, took just four years between development and deployment.

Over the past two years, Israel's multifront conflict environment has only accelerated these dynamics. New threats — such as mass rocket fire, drones, cyber disruption, and information warfare — forced rapid adjustments in systems, concepts, and organizational practices. The result was not a single technological "solution" but a pattern of continuous adaptation.

This approach contrasts with the American system, where innovation is often fragmented, siloed, and sequential: Development, testing, procurement, and deployment occur in discrete stages, often separated by years. The American system excels at producing world-class capabilities, but it struggles to produce and update them at the pace that modern conflict demands. There's a reason why the United States still flies 1950s-era B-52 bombers as it awaits new B-21 stealth bombers, which have now been in development and testing for more than a decade.

The lesson here is not that the United States should wholly abandon its model but that it should complement it. Israel's experience offers insights into how large defense institutions can shorten feedback loops, integrate operators into innovation processes, and prioritize relevance over optimization.

Preserving America's technological edge is less about inventing the next breakthrough technology or building the next best-in-class weapon system and more about institutionalizing faster learning, experimentation, and adaptation.

Historically, U.S.-Israel defense cooperation has been deep but largely transactional. The relationship has centered on intelligence-sharing, joint weapons development, and procurement. These are highly valuable domains, but they're typically episodic and bounded by specific programs. Above all, the relationship has rested on longstanding U.S. military assistance through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) framework, reflected in multiyear memoranda of understanding and Israel's procurement of major, high-end U.S. platforms such as the F-35. Notably, Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent visit to Miami for meetings with President Trump reportedly included discussions about moving beyond a model centered on military assistance and toward one grounded in joint cooperation on advanced research and development.

Strategic competition with China underscores the need for a deeper and more durable framework: a model of joint learning and innovation that treats defense R&D as a continuous, shared process rather than a collection of discrete projects.

Such a framework would not seek to replicate Israeli methods

For the United States, engaging Israel as a joint learning partner in these domains could accelerate innovation cycles and narrow the gap between conceptual development and operational deployment.

wholesale. Nor would it come at the expense of American strategic autonomy. Rather, it would establish structured pathways for co-development, experimentation, and mutual adaptation, particularly in areas where speed and integration are decisive. These can include:

- AI-enabled decision support;
- Counter-drone and autonomous defense systems;
- Resilient command-and-control capable of operating under cyber, space, and kinetic attack;
- Regional and global space-domain awareness and early warning.

Israel's defense R&D institutions, closely integrated with operational units, offer practical experience in how such capabilities evolve under sustained pressure. For the United States, engaging Israel as a joint learning partner in these domains could accelerate innovation cycles and narrow the gap between conceptual development and operational deployment.

One of the most consequential differences between the U.S. armed forces and the IDF is not technological sophistication; it's learning speed.

The IDF assumes that the next conflict will begin before the

last one has been fully understood (or even finished). As a result, learning is embedded in operations rather than deferred to postwar analysis. Training, doctrine, and experimentation evolve continuously, informed by real-time experience.

An illustration of this learning process emerged early in the Gaza war. As fighting intensified with Hamas inside the tunnel system, the IDF figured out that Hamas's subterranean infrastructure functioned as a single, interconnected network rather than in isolated shafts. It also became clear that Hamas's primary centers of gravity, command and control, production, communications, and logistics were concentrated underground. This led to a rapid doctrinal shift: from an initial focus on destroying tunnel entrances to a new operational concept centered on simultaneous above-ground and underground operations, targeting subsurface centers of gravity. Implementing this shift required entering and fighting within the tunnel network itself, demonstrating how operational friction translated directly into doctrinal adaptation in real time.

The U.S. military is oriented more toward post-conflict assessment. While rigorous and methodical, this approach risks lagging behind those who adapt in real time. In an era of peer competition, learning speed itself becomes a strategic asset.

Israel's integration into U.S. Central Command (Centcom) has strategic implications beyond operational coordination. Centcom now sits at the intersection of regional defense, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and is positioned to serve as a hub for experimentation and innovation in air and missile defense, space awareness, and multi-domain integration.

Israel's experience building layered defense systems and fusing military and civilian responses under fire offers valuable insights for a region increasingly defined by saturation attacks and hybrid threats. Embedding joint experimentation and R&D efforts within this regional framework could strengthen deterrence as well as readiness.

Significantly, this approach aligns with broader U.S. efforts to counter China's strategy of integrated, state-directed innovation. Rather than competing alone, only the United States can leverage regional trusted allies to create learning networks that match the pace and coherence of its competitors.

For Jewish communal, philanthropic, and educational leaders, the U.S.-Israel relationship has always been more than transactional. It reflects shared values, shared risks, and shared responsibility for the future of both societies.

In an era of accelerating technological competition, supporting deeper collaboration in defense innovation is not merely a security issue. It is a strategic investment in relevance, ensuring that democratic societies retain the capacity to adapt, deter, and defend in an increasingly chaotic and unstable world.

Philanthropic support, policy advocacy, and intellectual engagement can all play a role in advancing frameworks that emphasize joint learning, responsible innovation, and long-term strategic resilience.

The central challenge facing the United States is no longer whether it can outspend its adversaries. It is whether it can out-learn and out-adapt them.

Israel's experience over the past two years, operating on multiple fronts under constant pressure, offers no simple answers. But it does offer something increasingly rare: real-world insight into how military institutions adapt when superiority is contested and time is scarce.

By treating Israel as a joint learning and innovation partner, the United States can explore new ways to preserve its technological edge in an age of strategic competition with China. The goal is not imitation but integration, combining American scale with Israeli adaptability.

In the conflicts ahead, power will still matter. But relevance may matter more. And relevance, above all, depends on learning together. ✳

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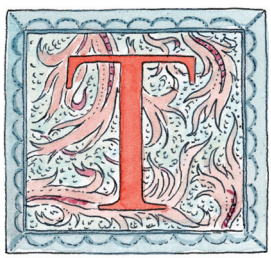
PART THREE

CULTURE

DAVID WOLPE

The Religious Humbling of America

Faith can bring us back together



THE DECLINE of religion in America is not a private matter of belief; it is a public crisis of character. In 2025, a study revealed that the percentage of Americans who consider religion personally important fell below 50 percent for the first time. Tocqueville saw religion as the secret of American democracy. Yet this secret is being dismantled and disregarded, and religion has acquired a bad name. Opponents often level accusations of hypocrisy against the religious: "You say you are religious, but you still do this?" But the accusation is itself an affirmation of religion's values, even if religious people don't always live up to them. The recognition of hypocrisy confirms the original principle. Religions, in general, have certain ideas about how to treat others and live a morally upstanding life. And these ideas are deep, complex, and interesting—not simply "be nice."

It is tragic to see religion wane in America at a moment when we desperately need it. Even as Americans insist on meaning, they

are steadily abandoning the institutions that it has long flowed through. Much of what ails us in this country is an impoverishment of the ideas that religion nourishes and promotes. Understanding and recovering those central values would help lead our society back from the ill feeling and ill will that have so powerfully gripped us.

The core religious ideas to which I refer—the dignity of every human being, gratitude, purpose as necessary to a well-lived life, humility, decency, the importance of community—have their source in belief in God. But we don't need to enter a theological argument to identify such values. Most people remain, in some deep sense, religious beings: believing in something that is greater than ourselves, intuiting a world that has a mystery at its heart, yearning for a direction to our dreams. Even if we reject traditional religion, a large majority of us still affirm that decency, goodness, humility, and justice aren't simple whims but essential for the stability of the social order, of our nation and our world. But along the path of progress—social, technological, financial—we have lost the art of practicing, or at times even recognizing, such values.

Having spent so much of my life in religious institutions, I am keenly aware that what religious people say and what they do can often be radically different. When I was a pulpit rabbi and something at the synagogue was upsetting a congregant, the offended person would invariably say, "How, in a religious institution…?!" As with anti-religious accusations of hypocrisy, they were highlighting religion's moral core. Whether they were in the right or the wrong, they were correct in using the term *religious* and not the fashionable *spiritual*. Spirituality is generally about how one feels, and religion is what one does with that feeling. Americans have not become secular; they have become spiritual in exactly the way that costs nothing, reinforced by spurious gurus and pabulum-stuffed bestsellers.

In the absence of religion, people are drawn to spiritual teachers

who promise a sort of automatic change in the world—that everything responds to what you "put out there." If you act a certain way, wallets and hearts and opportunities will magically open to you, as if the world will conform to your whim. The difference between spirituality and religion can be illustrated by the wise words of a 17th-century rabbi, Leon Modena. He observed that if you saw a man pulling a boat to the shore from some distance away, you might think he was pulling the shore to the boat. In prayer, Modena taught, we are not pulling God toward us, toward our whims and wishes, but rather we are pulling ourselves closer to God. You must change yourself to change the world, and that means how you act, not merely what you feel. Religion is about actions, the limbs rather than the emotions. It is a call to actualized spirituality.

The absence of religious sensibility is palpable in America today. The absence makes itself known in our failure to listen to one another, our preference for entertainment over information, and in our disregard for those outside of our ideological camp. A religious attitude toward life takes other human beings—and one's own soul—seriously. It has strength of conviction but also flexibility in listening to and learning from others and from the past. It sees the world as enchanted and our lives as drawing meaning from what is greater than our impulses or desires. Important and precious as the material world is, it is not all. A life lived with balance and values is a better life than one lived in extremes and nihilism.

America, champion of political and economic freedom, contains within it seeds of both greatness and greed. Consider Ayn Rand, one of the most influential thinkers on the American scene in the past century; her signature philosophy of objectivism holds that people owe nothing to others, including family members. Rand believed that people should act in their own self-interest and that altruism is destructive. She argued that self-interest is the only moral foundation. People should help others only if they want to, if they want to see others become happy and productive.

I once was invited to debate at an objectivist conference, and I

asked my opponent: If a child was literally starving in front of you, would you have an obligation to give him food? His answer was that he might well give the child food, but not out of obligation.

That self-centeredness filters through our society, taking the form of exhortations to rid ourselves of people who are "suppressive" or "toxic" or who, in one way or another, make onerous demands on us. Paradoxically, in a society where advertising seeks to create and then fill needs, we are advised that other people's needs are not our concern. Self-reliance is the call of the day, and if someone falters in that sphere, helping her is too often conflated with enabling her failure. Non-interference is the overarching principle, and the only mandate toward others is not to force, mistreat, or harm them.

Yet concern for others, and solicitude about their feelings, is a deeply religious impulse. Manners and civility demonstrate to others that we share the world, that our own place in it requires an accommodation to others. Honking your horn in a residential neighborhood violates simple *derech eretz* (consideration of others—or, more specifically, *hezek shemi'ah*, damage through noise). More broadly, it reflects a solipsism that does not see others as genuine kin, as fellow images of God.

When I was growing up, if anyone spiked a football, much less danced in the end zone, it was considered crass. It was an insult to your opponent and unsportsmanlike. Humiliating the losing side was not a triumph but a cause for shame. Now, one of the only public displays of faith is thanking God in the end zone for defeating the other team, as though God has a stake in the game. What does that reflect? Is God a fan of yours? In everything from music to public life, we are subjected to a steady stream of people's celebration of themselves.

Humility is a fundamental religious value, and it is the only characteristic that the Torah felt compelled to identify in Moses: "Now Moses was very humble, more so than any man on earth" (Numbers 12:3). Humility begins with recognizing how little of what we have is our own doing. When people compliment you on your intelligence, it may feel nice, but you did not earn IQ points or mental capacities.

They were a gift from God. You were born with them or perhaps born into an environment that encouraged their development—another gift. You were lucky. The same is true of appearance, physical prowess, and all sorts of skills that people were born with but nonetheless take pride in as though they were an accomplishment. It's true that you can sharpen what you were given; you can work hard. But even the conditions that permit hard work were given to you. Had you been born in a relocation camp in sub-Saharan Africa, you couldn't have aced that calculus test, because the test and the means of studying for it wouldn't be part of your life experience. If you are lucky, you were born not only with a capacity for work but in a country or a civilization where that work might be rewarded.

Abraham Lincoln declared in 1859, "I do not think myself fit for the Presidency," and in a letter in 1860 wrote that he was not "a man of great learning, or a very extraordinary one in any respect." How far we have come from that America. In a world that promotes self-esteem and discourages self-doubt, who speaks this way anymore in public life? Still, surrounded by people convinced that they're good, do we not yearn for a leader of outstanding merit who believes that he is not good enough? The reality that our greatest president could speak humbly in a way that might disqualify him from public life today reminds us that humility and achievement are not incompatible; they are simply unfashionable. That both Moses and Lincoln were distinguished by their humility reminds us how often that attribute is paired with greatness.

Humility is cousin to gratitude. Many times people have come to me when something difficult has befallen them and asked, "Why me?" Rarely does someone come into my office and say, "I have always had a home and a full belly—why me?" Or, "I grew up with parents who loved me and cared for me—why me?" Our good fortune seems natural and inevitable—only our misfortunes require explanation. Gratitude is related to humility because it requires admitting that something good was done for me, something I did not create or perhaps earn but that nonetheless enriches my life. When I was growing

up, the exemplar of America was the speech that Lou Gehrig, dying from ALS, gave in his final appearance at Yankee Stadium: "Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth." The recognition of blessing was once a central part of our humanity and of being an American. Only the humble can recognize blessing for what it truly is, and it makes the blessing so much sweeter.

Treasuring these values does not negate the real injustices of the world, the necessity to fight evil, or the recognition that certain situations and individuals diminish one's life rather than enhance it. But these values are, for religious traditions, the baseline. In the Torah, God does not pronounce the world perfect, just "good."

Gratitude and humility remind us how much of our world was shaped by the sacrifice of others whom we will never know. The closing lines of the greatest English novel, *Middlemarch*, reinforce this lesson:

> But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

Saying that America needs more religion means that we are deeply in need of these godly qualities. We owe it to one another to act with decency, and we owe it to ourselves to temper ego with humility, and we owe it to God and country to live in gratitude. ✳

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CAROLINE BRYK

Those Who Can, Teach

Those who can't, tech

THE JEWISH tradition offers many fitting metaphors for teachers. The Maharal of Prague saw teachers as sculptors of the soul. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch described them as gardeners tending to living plants. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik is said to have invoked the image of the teacher as a *sofer*—a Torah scribe—faithfully inscribing the Jewish inheritance into the minds of students, pupil by pupil, as a *sofer* does, letter by letter, onto parchment.

The teacher-as-scribe metaphor is as apt today as it was when Soloveitchik presciently uttered it a generation ago, if not more so. Back then, at the start of the digital age, the major consumer companies of the nascent computing industry were just getting started. But we never replaced Torah scrolls with computers. The practice of scriptural handwriting is not just a sacred commandment. Since the invention of the printing press, it has been a persistent act of resistance, a declaration of independence from automation and a demonstration of the fact that there are certain acts of transmission we refuse to outsource to machines. Today, America would do well to extend that same conviction to our metaphorical scribes: teachers.

Approximately 406,000 teaching positions are "either vacant or filled by underqualified teachers, which is about 1 in 8 classrooms nationally." Nearly half of America's schools report having at least one vacancy, and declining interest in and reverence for the teaching profession have led to a major pipeline crisis. The Jewish community has not been spared this crisis. Interviews with more than 60 heads of Jewish day schools across the United States held over the course of the past year have revealed a sense of urgency regarding the future teaching force. One head of a school in New Jersey reflected soberly:

> The pipeline issue is huge. We cannot find teachers. And we are in Bergen County—if we can't, who can?! It is a quality and quantity issue. What do I mean? I am replacing exceptional veteran teachers with graduates of online colleges, with much less capability. And they are demanding the same salary.

The head of a major Modern Orthodox day school in New York City also lamented:

> What keeps me up the most at night is the thought of not having teachers. Every time a teacher leaves or retires, I shed a tear. I know I won't be able to replace them. If I am, I know it will be a person with a tenth of the experience.

The pipeline crisis has many causes, including uncompetitive pay and a culture that has degraded and demoralized teaching. Ed schools, long notorious for ideological orthodoxy and low academic standards, have stripped rigor from the profession. They've taught their graduates that direct instruction is authoritarian, that imparting subject-matter knowledge is less important than "facilitation," and that student engagement matters more than student learning. This framework guts the intellectual authority of the teacher. In its place, the technology companies pressed their advantage.

As we stand at the threshold of an AI-driven world—and as

classrooms become increasingly digitized and algorithms mediate instruction — we must not lose sight of the importance of placing a master pedagogue at the center of a serious education. This fight is existential, for Jews and for all learners. We must choose *sofrim* over software.

In the early 2000s, for-profit EdTech companies began positioning themselves as saviors of schooling who could finally unlock student potential. Within a couple of years, what had been a niche educational-technology market ballooned into a $165 billion industry that has embedded itself in nearly every aspect of schooling. More than two decades later, 88 percent of U.S. public school districts operate one-to-one device programs, schoolwide initiatives that assign each student his or her own individual learning device — most often, a Google Chromebook.

Having been at the forefront of the campaign to persuade schools to go phone-free, given the incontrovertible evidence of their negative effects on children, I now realize that while we were focused on the deck chairs, the whole ship was sinking. For the past decade and a half, Google has been moving fast and breaking things inside our children's schools, getting students hooked on their screen interfaces. As a 2017 *New York Times* article on the subject noted, "Schools may be giving Google more than they are getting: generations of future customers."

Today's students move through the day tethered to screens: They might begin with math lessons on i-Ready, an adaptive instructional math app. During homeroom, they submit assignments via Google Classroom. They return to class to take quizzes administered on Canvas and learn through smartboard games such as Kahoot! Their homework is posted online, graded online, and returned online. From attendance to dismissal — and into the late hours of the evening — digital platforms now set the rhythm and structure

Leading experts have begun to sound the alarm on the link between screen-saturated schools and diminished cognitive capacity in today's students.

of learning, relieving them of any need to pick up a pen or piece of paper.

Why, you might ask, is this a problem? Leading experts have begun to sound the alarm on the link between screen-saturated schools and diminished cognitive capacity in today's students. As neuroscientist Jared Cooney Horvath has now definitively shown in his book *The Digital Delusion*, today's children are, on average, less cognitively capable than previous generations were at their age. Drawing on more than 50 years of research, Horvath unpacks why the meteoric rise of educational technology is to blame. As recently summarized in *The Economist*:

> Long-term trends raise the possibility that the rise of in-class devices is responsible for an alarming decline in performance in reading and other subjects. Scores on 21 nationwide benchmark tests rose from 1994 until peaking in 2012-15, when screen use started to soar; they then began to sink. In major assessments for maths, science and reading from 2011 to 2019, greater in-school computer use for learning correlates with lower scores. In contrast, students in classes with rare or no computer use at all typically score highest.

We ought to take Horvath's warning seriously—not only because of its implications for our students but because of the

threat screen use poses to current and aspiring teachers. As Matthias Bitton wrote in a March 2025 essay in *Mosaic*:

> When students face the screen, the distinctive pedagogical qualities of the teacher fade into the background. Algorithms have recast teachers as consultants, facilitators, managers of classrooms that are no longer meaningfully their own.

Nothing could be more antagonistic to Jewish notions and methods of pedagogy embedded in the language of tradition. The term *rabbi*, the honorific of Jewish religious authority, literally means teacher, a display of reverence for teaching as the most revered of all vocations. For thousands of years, our rabbis, our teachers, have trained students to study in *chevruta* (partnership), a word meant to evoke the interpersonal connection that develops when peers engage together in study and experience its power. The Hebrew word for education—*chinukh*—is the same as that for dedication, an integral spiritual feature of the pedagogical dynamic between teacher and student. This concept is given beautiful and brilliant exposition in the 1932 book *Chovat Ha-Talmidim* (*The Students' Obligation*), by Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the teacher of the Warsaw Ghetto, shot to death in 1943. In Shapira's timeless words:

> The term, *chinukh*, applies to the readying for a craft which is within the inner potential of a person to do.... And when this word is used about educating children, the intention is to expand and develop the nature and talent of the child found in small measure, in potential or even in hiding—and to reveal it.... But an educator who wants to reveal the hidden and stored away soul of the student, to uplift it and set it on fire with a divine fire that reaches the Highest Holy One, such that all of him—even the powers of his body—grows in holiness and pines for God's Torah, he is required to soften himself towards the student that he is educating. He must delve into his juvenility and smallness

until he reaches the spark of his stored away—or even hidden—soul, bring it out, develop it and grow it.

These examples merely tap the surface of what Judaism has to say about teaching as the medium through which interpersonal bonds are built and knowledge created. What we are witnessing today is nothing less than the displacement of that medium with digital, impersonal media designed by profit-seeking enterprises. Alarmingly, the educational establishment itself has been ushering in this digital dystopia. In the fall of 2025, a senior leader from Alpha School—a network that replaces traditional classroom teachers with personalized AI tutors—addressed Jewish day school leaders at a prominent tristate-area day school. In a beautiful beit midrash, surrounded by shelves lined with canonical texts, he made a forceful case for transitioning day schools to fully digital learning platforms, replacing traditional teachers with "coaches" who guide students through AI-mediated learning modules and dispensing with physical books until high school.

The educators present were right to feel a deep sense of unease. Reams of research indicate the primacy of print for reading comprehension, despite a perfectly misguided 2012 initiative by the U.S. Department of Education and Federal Communications Commission to transition American schools from print to digital textbooks in the subsequent five years. Somehow, a few of the school leaders are still intrigued by the billionaire-tech-entrepreneur-turned-education-reformer who promised to "optimize" learning.

Even media coverage of these developments is a case in point. As I was considering writing a response to an article I read online about AI in Jewish day schools, I was informed that it probably wouldn't be published. Why? Because the article itself was sponsored (i.e., paid-for) content. Apparently, I had failed to pick up on the underlying profit-motive dynamics of what I had read online.

Schools are simply the newest frontier in the techno-capitalist colonization of our minds—ours and our children's. In recent

Unfortunately, even with mounting evidence highlighting the harmful effects of educational technology on learning, we cannot rely on legislation to address the problem anytime soon.

discussions about the teacher shortage, the prevailing response I have heard is simple: *Not enough teachers? Deploy AI tutors.* It may sound pragmatic, even innovative. But those who say it seem unaware that they have been conditioned to see it this way by the very same multimillion-dollar tech companies that are algorithmically guiding the rest of their decisions. The solution seems perfect by design because the problem itself is by design.

Recent studies have seen teachers attribute their departure from the profession to the proliferation of these tech tools and the stress and anxiety they cause. Massachusetts middle school teacher Benjamin Coleman, for example, left the profession after 10 happy years in Fall River. "The day that the principal told us that we needed to do i-Ready three times a week, that's when I was done. . . . That's not what I went to college for." As classrooms become increasingly digitized and algorithms mediate instruction, talented, idealistic young people—those who aspire to careers in the art of teaching—will be dissuaded from entering the field.

It's even worse for teachers who embrace the techno tools and thereby hasten their own professional demise. When Google saw the market opportunity in public schools, it bypassed administrators and marketed directly to teachers, "the gatekeepers to the classroom." Administrators such as Lachlan Tidmarsh, then the

Chicago Public School District's chief information officer, acquiesced as a matter of fait accompli, concluding, as a 2017 *New York Times* story put it, "If individual teachers were already using Google's services, the district should officially adopt the platform — to make sure, for instance, that younger children couldn't email with strangers." Was this just a coincidence, or is it more likely that Google is good at engineering human behavior as well as software?

Replacing teachers with proprietary algorithms will not solve the shortage — it will worsen it. The early-adopting teachers of AI seem unaware that they are fostering their own obsolescence. What need will there be for costly teachers when you have AE (artificial education) generating lesson plans, creating assignments, and even grading work that was probably produced by AI itself? The teacher-pipeline crisis, in the Jewish community and in America as a whole, is in fact a prelude to the teacher-identity crisis, when the educator is recast in our communal imagination from an architect of continuity, to borrow a phrase from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, to a supervisor of machines.

Unfortunately, even with mounting evidence highlighting the harmful effects of educational technology on learning, we cannot rely on legislation to address the problem anytime soon. Google, Meta, and other major tech platforms possess the legal resources, lobbying influence, and indirect funding mechanisms to stymie nationwide reform. Those of us seeking to fight against them find ourselves operating under what social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has recently called their "corrupt vetocracy," a system in which concentrated interests can block meaningful reform even when broad public and bipartisan support exists. In this vetocratic system, change must begin locally, which is precisely where Jewish institutions can — and must — serve as moral leaders.

Our day schools have a playbook for getting tech devices out of

schools: In 2023, we at Tikvah launched a campaign to mobilize a national network of Jewish day schools to go phone-free, bell to bell, well before legislation took effect. This shift was driven by aggressive local campaigns: holding regional conferences; giving presentations to parents and boards across the country; drafting model policies for schools to iterate; and providing heads of school the opportunity to sit and rewrite policy collectively.

With bills proposing restrictions on EdTech under consideration in 16 states so far this year, the time is ripe for the Jewish community to reclaim its role as a moral and educational leader and a protector of our nation's children. As these bills move through state legislatures, the national network of Jewish day schools should be among the first institutions that lawmakers can point to as evidence of the positive outcomes from a return to personal pedagogy. While individual districts and schools such as Kansas's McPherson Middle School have already begun reversing course on EdTech devices, the Jewish community offers a scalable model for sharing educational philosophy and practice that has proved catalytic in the fight against phones in schools.

A campaign against one-to-one devices is already underway in the Jewish day school community. In recent years, Manhattan Day School, Atlanta Jewish Academy, and Ben Porat Yosef (a day school in northern New Jersey) have significantly scaled back or eliminated their one-to-one device programs, recognizing the detrimental effects of screen-saturated classrooms on student learning. A series of recent events led by Tikvah convened school leaders to spark action and tackle these challenges. In late February, leadership teams from 18 Jewish day schools gathered for a program with Horvath for a sober discussion on the ways digital classrooms violate the neurobiology of learning. In the weeks that followed, several school teams reconvened to reassess their technology programs, conduct in-school tech audits, and draft plans for thoughtful rollbacks. The following month, leaders from more than 40 additional schools convened in Miami and heard

from educational consultant Emily Cherkin about the harms of screen time in school and her congressional testimony on the subject. While legislative solutions may take years to materialize, communities, be they religious, local, or otherwise, guided by shared values and moral clarity, can be the pioneers charting a better course.

To conclude where I began, Jewish communities today possess the printing and manufacturing technologies to mass-produce flawless Torah scrolls. And yet they do not, because writing Torah scrolls by hand is a mitzvah. A civilization that refuses to automate its scripture must refuse to automate its teachers. There is profound wisdom in the commandment to write Torah scrolls by hand. Labor creates deep attachment, binding our people to our text. I'm willing to bet that at some point while reading this article, you felt a moment of gratitude for a teacher you had, perhaps many, perhaps not so many, years ago. For me, it was my fifth-grade English teacher at Ramaz, a Modern Orthodox co-educational day school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. My teacher was Ms. Vicki Ginsberg, who challenged the class to memorize 59 lines of Robert Frost's "Birches," which I can still recite to this day. Ms. Ginsberg understood something essential: A love of text is often born in laboring with it.

Rabbi Joseph Lookstein, the founder of Ramaz, wrote that Jewish educators are "associates of God." That doesn't sound replaceable to me. If only we treated them that way. ✳

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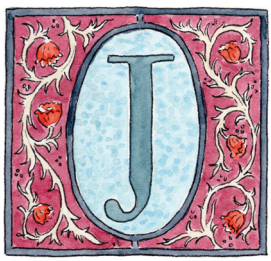
REIHAN SALAM

Islam in America

What will the future hold?



UST DAYS before his historic victory in New York City's 2025 mayoral election, Zohran Mamdani gave remarks outside the Islamic Cultural Center of The Bronx. He claimed that his aunt had stopped taking the subway after the September 11 attacks because she "did not feel safe in her hijab," and he spoke of the "fear and humiliation" that she and other Muslim New Yorkers had been forced to endure in the years since. Soon afterward, critics observed that Mamdani's only living aunt at the time resided in Tanzania and was not known to wear a hijab. Mamdani later clarified that he was referring to a distant, deceased cousin of his father's, a woman named Zehra, whom he referred to as an "aunt" in accordance with cultural tradition.

Having grown up as a Muslim in Brooklyn, I can say that Mamdani's bleak sense of Muslim life in that era of New York City does not ring true to me. What I remember most vividly from the

aftermath of 9/11 were the displays of solidarity among New Yorkers and the many pronouncements from public officials decrying anti-Muslim hatred. Though civil libertarians objected to NYPD surveillance of Muslim houses of worship and other organizations in the years that followed, these measures by and large struck me as defensible, not least because they were grounded in a desire to understand Muslim communities and to protect them along with the rest of the city.

Nevertheless, Mamdani's belief that modern America is rife with Islamophobia is ascendant among younger American Muslims. In conversations with Bangladeshi Americans a generation younger than myself, I've been surprised by how estranged from America many of them feel, and how natural and even ennobling that estrangement seems to them. One survey from the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley found that 60 percent of Muslim respondents believe that Islamophobia in the United States is a very big problem, and that concern about Islamophobia was most acute among younger, female, and U.S.-born Muslims — the very Muslims most thoroughly incorporated into the American mainstream.

Notably, while Mamdani and other young American Muslims see Islamophobia as a pervasive threat, it does not appear to have stymied the rapid growth of the American Muslim population, which now stands at somewhere between 4 and 4.5 million, or close to triple its size in 2000. Though some of this growth can be attributed to the relative youth and fertility of America's Muslim minority, its chief driver has been legal immigration. If current trends hold, Muslims are poised to surpass Jews as the nation's second-largest religious group by 2040.

The question for policymakers is not whether American Muslims are a growing political force — that much is beyond dispute, as evidenced by the rise of Mamdani, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Abdul El-Sayed, and other stalwarts of the Democratic Left. It's whether American institutions are thinking clearly about

what that growth portends. The answer turns on two ideological tendencies within the American Muslim population that are distinct in their character, different in their dangers, and yet mutually reinforcing.

The first is Islamism, a transnational revolutionary ideology that seeks to capture state power in order to impose Islamic law and that rejects any separation between religious authority and political life. Islamism commands the allegiance of a distinct minority of American Muslims, but its most dangerous manifestation — jihadism, or the turn to violence in pursuit of Islamist objectives — is an urgent threat. The second is Third Worldism, a fusion of anti-Zionism, anti-Westernism, and anti-capitalism that places the sacralized victimhood of Palestinian Arabs at the center of a larger struggle against American imperialism. Unlike Islamism, Third Worldism is not primarily a religion-based ideology. Its most committed adherents, such as Mamdani himself, tend to lead largely secular lives. But, in important respects, it presents the more consequential long-term ideological challenge. Where jihadism targets American civilians as part of a larger struggle to overthrow "apostate" regimes in the Muslim world, Third Worldism endeavors to transform the nation's ideological-intellectual milieu, shaping how Americans — well beyond the Muslim minority — understand their country and its place in the world.

Islamism's violent potential was underscored in March this year when Ayman Mohamad Ghazali, a 41-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen from Lebanon, rammed his truck into the entrance of Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan, where 140 children were attending the synagogue's early-childhood center. He drove down a hallway with a rifle before his vehicle burst into flames. Ghazali had reportedly lost several family members to an Israeli airstrike in Lebanon — two of whom have been identified by the

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IDF as members of Hezbollah. Rather than seek revenge by making his way to Lebanon to fight Israel, he chose to slaughter Jewish children in suburban Michigan.

Ghazali was not an aberration. That same month, Mohamed Bailor Jalloh, of Sierra Leone, and Ndiaga Diagne, of Senegal, carried out similar deadly lone-actor jihadist attacks in Virginia and Texas, respectively. The previous summer, Mohamed Soliman, an Egyptian national, firebombed a hostage-solidarity rally in Colorado, killing one. Each was an immigrant; each imagined he was acting in solidarity with Muslims abroad. They are part of a broader pattern of jihadist violence in America stretching back decades — a pattern that includes not only immigrants who brought their grievances with them but also native-born and long-resident Americans who acquired them here.

Lone-actor attacks are by definition difficult to anticipate and interdict. Hardening potential targets — securing buildings, increasing physical barriers, posting armed guards — can mitigate the damage, and it has undoubtedly saved many lives. But it cannot address the upstream failure that allowed these men into the country in the first place.

Why, for example, did the United States grant a spousal visa and then citizenship to Ghazali, a man so intimately connected

to a designated foreign terrorist organization? There is a meaningful difference between the "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" that Donald Trump called for in December 2015 and the targeted, constitutional vetting reforms that these cases make plainly necessary. Rather than putting the onus on consular officials to definitively prove that a Lebanese national is not aligned with Hezbollah, federal law ought to shift the burden of proof to petitioners, requiring them to demonstrate that the individuals they are sponsoring are willing to live in accordance with American norms. Federal law already criminalizes fraud on sponsorship forms, but punishment after the fact is no substitute for rigorous screening before the visa is granted. Thoughtful vetting of newcomers from societies rife with extremism and religious intolerance is not an act of bigotry. It is common sense. It is also, despite the objections of the civil-libertarian Left, an act of protection for the millions of American Muslims who want nothing to do with the violence committed in the name of their faith.

Vetting reforms, however carefully designed, address only one failure mode. They cannot screen for the radicalization that happens after arrival — in prisons, in online communities, and in the darker corners of American Muslim life. That problem is harder to see and address, because it is inseparable from the changing character of American assimilation itself.

The conventional wisdom holds that American Muslims are a success story — and by many measures, they are. According to a 2025 survey from the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), 36 percent of Muslim Americans hold a bachelor's degree or higher, roughly comparable to the Protestant share and above that of white Evangelicals and Catholics. Nearly a quarter report household incomes above $100,000, broadly in line with those of

other religious communities, and well above the incomes of white Evangelicals. Relative to their counterparts in the United Kingdom or France, American Muslims are more tolerant toward other religious faiths, more likely to identify with the country they live in, and less likely to live in Muslim-majority enclaves, even after adjusting for income, education, age, and sex. One long-standing hypothesis is that while European societies tend to have more rigid ethnic identities, America's more inclusive national identity, its history as an immigrant-rich society, and its openness to religious observance have made it much easier for Muslims, including observant Muslims, to feel at home.

Feeling at home, however, is not the same as feeling content. Political scientists Justin Gest and Richard Nielsen have observed that American Muslims are less trusting of societal and government institutions than their European counterparts are, a gap they attribute to the greater integration of American Muslims. The more you see a society as your own, the more entitled you feel to voice frank opinions about its supposed deficiencies—a phenomenon that has been dubbed "the integration paradox."

Efforts to understand Muslim assimilation are further complicated by religious attrition. A significant and growing share of Americans raised Muslim have quietly stopped identifying with the faith altogether. As analysts at the Cato Institute have argued, surveys of American Muslims tend to exclude ex-Muslims, so the data we have systematically overstate the share of the broader Muslim-origin population that retains a Muslim identity. What remains in the surveys, then, is a population skewed toward those who do retain that identity, whether as a matter of sincere religious practice or, increasingly, as a matter of political commitment. For a subset of younger American Muslims, the faith has become less a set of devotional practices than an emblem of resistance to Westernness and whiteness.

Together, the integration paradox and religious attrition explain something that might otherwise seem puzzling: why the most

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committed and articulate voices of Muslim anti-Americanism in the United States are not marginalized, dispossessed, under-assimilated newcomers. Rather, they are privileged, cosmopolitan, first- and second-generation insiders who lead largely secular lives. Consider Mamdani and Hasan Piker, two hyper-assimilated American Muslims who have risen to prominence on the strength of their anti-Zionism, one through electoral politics, the other through a mass cultural platform that has made him one of the most followed political voices in the country.

Having successfully navigated the institutions of American meritocracy, many young American Muslims have rejected the quiet gratitude that one associates with immigrants and their children of earlier eras. Instead, they have undergone what the political scientist Robert Leiken has called "anti-West westernization" or "adversarial assimilation": a process by which incorporation into American institutions produces not attachment to patriotic narratives of American freedom, individualism, and benevolence but hostility toward them. This phenomenon is especially common, I suspect, among younger South Asians broadly—a highly educated, upwardly mobile group increasingly overrepresented in the uppermost echelons of the American Left. Regarding South Asian Muslims specifically, the ISPU's 2025 American Muslim Poll offers suggestive evidence: While 59 percent of Asian Muslims identified

the war in Gaza as their top policy priority in the 2024 presidential election, the same was true of only 32 percent of white and 12 percent of black Muslims.

It is in this restless, estranged population — secular in practice, Muslim in political identity — that Third Worldism finds its most fertile ground.

Third Worldism is not a recent invention. Its intellectual roots run through the Algerian War of Independence, when Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon moralized revolutionary violence as a cleansing, liberatory force, and through Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which recast Western knowledge itself as a colonial enterprise. Institutionalized in American universities over the following decades, these ideas hardened into what Hudson Institute scholar Zineb Riboua calls a "political theology": a worldview that treats any movement arrayed against Western power as inherently righteous. By October 7, 2023, it had migrated from the fringes of academia into mainstream political life. The slogans that appeared within hours of the Hamas attacks were not spontaneous expressions of outrage but the product of a conceptual system built over decades, now fluently spoken by a generation of American politicians and activists.

Third Worldism's most visible manifestation is not terrorism but what my colleague Tal Fortgang calls civil terrorism: mass unlawful behavior designed to coerce people into adopting unpopular political positions, typically by going just far enough to break the law while stopping short of bodily harm. Think of the college students who took over campus quads and libraries while raging against "Zionists"; nonprofits that vowed to keep blocking roads until Americans stopped supporting Israel; or vandalism that lionizes terrorist groups. None of these actions are constitutionally protected protests. They are harassment, intimidation, and

antisocial behavior—a deliberate strategy to maximize disruption at minimal personal risk. That protesters so often hide their faces and evade accountability is itself the confession: Theirs is a politics of coercion, not conscience.

The secular character of Third Worldism also explains phenomena that might otherwise seem incoherent. Consider the seeming contradiction of "Queers for Palestine." Presumably, the activists behind this movement oppose the criminalization of homosexuality, a core tenet of Islamism. Their choice of ally, therefore, makes sense only if they understand Islam primarily as a political identity rather than a religious one and if their chief motivation is hostility to American power and its perceived proxies. Third Worldism's capacity to recruit across racial, religious, and ethnic lines is precisely what makes it a more expansive and durable ideological challenge than Islamism. It is also what makes it so dangerous as a permission structure for Islamist violence. By celebrating "anti-imperialist" resistance movements as inherently righteous and insisting that the real violence is always structural, always Western, and always Zionist, Third Worldism provides the moral vocabulary according to which attacks like Ghazali's become, for some, not atrocities but acts of liberation.

The policy responses available are imperfect but not negligible. First, states should vigorously enforce existing laws against civil terrorism and raise penalties for antisocial behavior that exploits the gray zone between criminality and prosecution, as Utah's legislature recently did. The logic is familiar from "broken windows" policing: Tolerating minor disorder signals that major disorder will be tolerated, too. Civil terrorists count on prosecutors looking the other way. Vigorous prosecution would prove them wrong. Second, the federal government should investigate the networks organizing acts of civil terrorism for criminal conspiracy, nonprofit law violations, and material support for terrorism. You can't criminalize Third Worldist ideas, but you can dismantle the infrastructure that translates them into organized campaigns of harassment and intimidation.

> Third Worldism's capacity to recruit across racial, religious, and ethnic lines is precisely what makes it a more expansive and durable ideological challenge than Islamism. It is also what makes it so dangerous as a permission structure for Islamist violence.

The deeper challenge is the ideas themselves. Foreign funding of American educational institutions warrants disclosure requirements and perhaps even outright prohibition. But that only addresses the problem on the margins. Our universities are already saturated with anti-Western orthodoxies that require no foreign subsidy. The more fundamental reform is structural: increasing the accountability of universities to their trustees and, through them, to the public. The goal is not ideological coercion but the restoration of a minimal civic commitment: respect for the society that makes free inquiry and religious liberty possible in the first place.

Third Worldism, left unchecked, won't remain on the radical fringe. Consider the first months of Zohran Mamdani's mayoralty. In March 2026, two men inspired by ISIS attempted to detonate shrapnel-filled improvised explosive devices outside Gracie Mansion. Mamdani forcefully condemned the anti-Islam rally that preceded the attack—but even after describing the bombing attempt as "a heinous act of terrorism," he declined to name or condemn the jihadist ideology that inspired it. The following month, he vetoed a city council bill establishing protest buffer zones around schools, citing concerns about the rights of

pro-Palestinian demonstrators. Somehow, Third Worldists always insist on maximum vigilance about Islamophobia while offering little more than equivocation about jihadism.

Third Worldism is a serious challenge, but it is not without precedent. Consider the trajectory of an earlier immigrant population that gave rise to its own generation of radicals: Jews.

Third Worldism is proving as seductive to today's second-generation American Muslim radicals as socialism, Communism, and anarchism were to the second-generation Jewish radicals of the 1920s and 1930s. The parallel is closer than it might appear. Like today's Third Worldists, the Jewish radicals of that era were largely secular. Their radicalism was a substitute identity rather than an extension of religious practice, a way of channeling communal energy into political commitment. The Rosenbergs, convicted of treason by a Jewish judge and executed in 1951, are the tragic extreme and long tail of that tendency. Like Third Worldism, the Jewish radical movements of the early- and mid-20th century were not marginal phenomena; they shaped American intellectual and political life in ways that took decades to work through.

What eventually brought the children and grandchildren of Jewish radicals back was not suppression but confidence: America's mid-century commitment to its own liberalism, the demonstrable reality of its promise of equality under the law. For Jews, the arc from adversarial to patriotic assimilation was neither automatic nor guaranteed. It required America to live up to its own ideals. But it happened. Is a similar arc available to the second-generation American Muslims now in the grip of Third Worldism? And do American institutions have the conviction to make the case?

Needless to say, I am not a disinterested observer of these questions. I am the son of Muslim immigrants whose lives were profoundly damaged by Islamist violence in their country of origin

and who felt immense gratitude to this country for the opportunity to build a life. The Islam of my youth was a syncretic tradition deeply rooted in Sufism; it respected Hindu practices and valued tolerance above all else. It is my decidedly imperfect religious upbringing that has made me hostile to political Islam, which I've long understood as an effort to subsume local identities and practices into a sterile, homogenizing neo-imperial project, one more concerned with subjugating religious minorities and other dissenters than with achieving spiritual transcendence. That formation has left me alert, not indifferent, to what Islamism and Third Worldism are doing to the humane, tolerant traditions that I and many other American Muslims actually come from.

And I am far from alone in this regard. The millions of American Muslims who celebrate, identify with, and depend on the freedom and pluralism that Islamism violently rejects have as much at stake in this argument as anyone. So, too, do the lapsed American Muslims who have quietly abandoned their religious inheritance altogether, sometimes out of outrage and shame over the horrors committed in the name of Islam.

We cannot ban noxious ideologies, nor should we try. What we can do is defend the tradition that makes pluralism possible: the tradition George Washington invoked in 1790 when he promised the Hebrew Congregation of Newport that this would be a nation in which "every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid." That promise was made to Jews. It applies equally to Muslims. It is worth defending. ✳

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SARA PAASCHE-ORLOW
& AMY SCHECTMAN

To Age Not Alone

Honoring our elders means not abandoning them

AGING CAN BE SEEN through the lens of decline and loss or through the lens of growth and expansion, and our Jewish sources lean into the latter. In Pirkei Avot's description of the life cycle, fullness and strength come not before but after old age sets in: "At sixty, old age; at seventy, fullness of years; at eighty, the age of "strength" (5:21). The Hebrew word for old — *zakein* — is interpreted by some as an acronym for *ze kanah chokhma*, one who has acquired wisdom.

America's attitude toward aging and the elderly is the opposite of what Judaism teaches. Our productivity-focused society is, reasonably enough, organized around the youthful wage-earning years of life. But the side effect of this is the marginalization of America's aging population. Whereas loneliness is not uncommon among older adults globally, the prevalence of it in North America is the highest on earth. The reality for America's older adults is exactly counter to what we pray for frequently during the High Holiday

season: "Do not cast me off in old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me" (Psalm 71).

What does it feel like to be "cast off" or "forsaken" in old age? That the psalmist gives voice to these fears indicates how rational, common, and deeply human a fear it is. We are social creatures whose lives revolve around one another in all sorts of ways. Our need for sociality and community, both for their own sake and for the material resources they generate, does not disappear once we stop working for a living. One of the first insights God articulates in Genesis about the nature of human beings is that, for them, being alone "is not good." We often think about this in relation to Adam and Eve and marriage, but it applies to all forms of connection and the need for affection and emotional and physical support, and it doesn't go in only one direction. A wonderful midrash posits that Adam and Eve went so far astray in the Garden of Eden because they didn't have any elders to guide them. To forsake the elderly is to be bereft of their wisdom.

And sometimes that wisdom is unintentional. One of us, Sara, used to serve a community in which one of the elderly congregants would mispronounce a phrase in the Shabbat morning liturgy — often singing it at the top of her lungs because of hearing impairment. Instead of saying *ki l'olam chasdo*, she would say *bi l'olam chasdo*, changing the meaning from "God's mercy endures forever" to "in me is God's mercy eternal." It was an accidental teaching, calling on us to realize God's mercy through our personal honoring of and reverence for elders. The way to do that is to manifest that reverence in the policies and programs we create to support each and every person as they age.

The Jewish tradition has always treated elders as central and essential community members. In mishnaic times (70–200 CE), there was a culture to gather the elderly in the place of worship so that

whoever arrived and needed a quorum for prayer could recite their full prayers with the elders as their community. This practice hints of what Robert Putnam, Lewis Feldstein, and Donald Cohen would discover many generations later and write about in their 2023 book, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*: When communities include people of all ages and create opportunities for interaction and contribution, individuals and the community as a whole are both stronger. One illustrative case study is Experience Corps, a program in which retirees assist in tutoring and mentoring roles that "reconnect isolated seniors with schools, students, and community life." The program exemplifies how older adults can play active, valued roles in civic life rather than being sidelined.

The collective term for the nodes of social involvement like the one this program facilitates is *society*, and American society would benefit greatly from Jewish teachings in this regard. Jewish teachings about caring for and incorporating elders into community can and should become a template for how American society organizes itself.

What might this look like?

One promising model of a place where this puzzle was solved is Israel. If you think elder care is unaffordable in a wealthy country like the United States, imagine what it was like in the early days of the kibbutzim. These communities were full of smart, capable people without capital. Their sense of communal cohesion derived from the fact that each person was needed for the collective to function. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel observed, older adults need more than to be healthy and supported; they must have the opportunity to be needed: "What a person needs is not only a sense of belonging but also a sense of indebtedness." Communities, whether specifically elder or retirement communities or communities where elderly people live, should encourage volunteering of some kind in accordance with each member's physical or mental talents and capacities.

In the elder community that Amy runs, 10 hours of volunteering per week are required of all residents, and the results have been

As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel observed, older adults need more than to be healthy and supported; they must have the opportunity to be needed: 'What a person needs is not only a sense of belonging but also a sense of indebtedness.'

phenomenal. What began as a way to save money on staff and overhead costs quickly morphed into a central defining feature of life in that community. The requirement disproportionately attracted people who have a penchant for community-building. They began building community before the facility even opened, starting their own WhatsApp groups and Google chats and sharing forums that have continued to nurture that community now that they've moved in. Like Heschel, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks argued that a person only really dies from not having something to contribute. Treating the aging population with dignity means treating them like other members of the community, with something to offer.

The importance of community in the later decades of life also helps to dispel a common misconception: that living in a senior community is some kind of failure. The American ethos maintains a fixation on "independence"—personal as much as national—defined by one's ability to live on one's own with literally no dependence on others. This rather narrow vision of societal values correlates to imagery of American success: pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps, not depending on anyone. But it can lead to what is often referred to as the "independent isolation paradox," the false notion that staying at home is what maintains independence. The statistics

Making new friends and connections slows down deterioration, so it is essential that older adults are in environments where there's opportunity for human connection as long as possible.

suggest otherwise. An aging person's commitment to living alone can too often result in a person becoming a prisoner in her own home and losing physical and mental function. The data show that being lonely increases by 59 percent the rate at which one loses one's ability to perform what's referred to medically as "activities of daily living (ADLs)" — the scientific measure of independence. Loneliness actually accelerates the difficult parts of the aging process. Making new friends and connections slows down deterioration, so it is essential that older adults are in environments where there's opportunity for human connection as long as possible.

If community is the key to an end of life that's well lived, one goal our society should set for honoring our elders should be to make community both available and affordable for as many elders as possible. Both of these — availability and affordability — are notable challenges. But they are not insurmountable by any means, and it's important to think of the two in tandem. The fact of the matter is that most things are available to people who can afford them. The aging population includes those of high net worth, for whom optimal medical care in a strong community is affordable and available. What these elders and those caring for them should prioritize is living in environments with opportunities for social engagement. In old age, people will have outlived a significant number of their friends or will no longer live close to friends, since they've moved closer to their

younger family members caring for them. With their physical and medical needs being attended to, their mental well-being will be enhanced by the ability to make new friends and new connections for social interaction.

But those in the low- and moderate-income categories generally have a harder time finding affordable quality care in the context of a community. Whereas all Americans age 65 and older are eligible for Medicare, Medicare coverage does not include assisted living or home care or long-term care of the sort that's often required in old age and that, in some facilities or multigenerational contexts, can come with a community of peers. Our society needs to come up with ways to help all older Americans become part of communities where their increasing medical needs will be taken care of as well.

There are several promising policy pathways to make this happen. For example, in 2024 Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey set up a Special Commission on Senior Housing "charged with studying strategies to create affordable, healthy housing for seniors." The commission's recently published "Building for Aging" report outlines a series of recommendations that would be game-changing for older adults in her state, including streamlining the development of affordable housing units for older adults. The report is worth reading to understand the role that state government can play in senior housing for those who can't afford expensive long-term care, and it specifically highlights the need "to promote the advantages of aging in community to attract more moderate-income older adults."

With more older adults joining these housing communities, costs for their care can be made more efficient through what the report calls a Place-Based Services Pool Fund that "could combine multiple new and existing funding sources, including an investment from health plans, housing providers, and the Commonwealth." Both the public and private sector can play a role in this place-based services optimization, and this kind of innovative thinking should be adapted in additional states.

It is not uncommon to encounter a backlash, even within the Jewish community, for providing public funds to support older adults.

Support for elders is often sidelined in favor of support for young people. People critical of government funding for elder care might readily support government allocations to Jewish private schools, in which a pupil might learn the following passage from the *Shulchan Arukh*, considered the most authoritative Jewish legal text, requiring a child to support his parents in old age: "If the parent does not have [the means] and the adult child does have [the means], we force the adult child to fulfill the needs of the parent according to what the child can afford" (*Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 240:5). While the *Shulchan Arukh* also sets limits to protect the work life and standard of living of the adult child, in doing so, the text stresses two components: 1) the need to care for one's parents as a basic obligation, and 2) the need for one to care for oneself at the same time.

What if our society were more sensitive to both factors? Social policies are needed to ensure that family caregivers have the means to assist elders, including perhaps legal dispensations and protections for those caring for elderly family members. This will allow and even encourage people to create an integrated society that cares for its elders without destroying the health or stability of caregivers.

The Torah could not be any clearer about the honor to be accorded to all elderly people: "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old" (Leviticus 19:32). The *Shulchan Arukh* is even more precise, defining the person in question as anyone age 70 or older, "even if he is an ignoramus, provided he is not wicked."

> From when is one obligated to stand before them? From the moment they enter within four cubits (about two meters) until they pass out of one's line of sight. Someone riding is considered as walking. It is forbidden to deliberately close one's eyes before

he reaches within four cubits in order to avoid having to stand up for him when he comes closer. (*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah*, 244:1–3)

The specificity of the obligation and its focus on proximity are instructive. We are obligated to rise before those elderly who are within our sphere of perception, and not to look away. What if our society as a whole were to internalize this moral teaching? How might we rise for the generation who brought us into this world? ✳

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DEPARTURES

ISAAC HART

Jewish Masterpiece: *American Pastoral*

Philip Roth's American Job

EING Jewish does not weigh heavily on Seymour Levov, the broad-shouldered, blue-eyed, almost perfectly Americanized Jew at the center of *American Pastoral*, Philip Roth's tragic novel from 1997. Like the predecessors who ranked among what one critic called Roth's "Jewish centaurs" — fledgling Neil Klugman of "Goodbye, Columbus"; festering Alexander Portnoy of *Portnoy's Complaint*; Nathan Zuckerman, the alter-ego novelist, in the playfully metafictional Zuckerman Bound series published from 1979 to 1985 — Levov springs from Weequahic High School, in a densely Jewish section of Newark, around the end of World War II. Those men tended to share close variations of a warped, prodigiously neurotic personality — rating high on the charts of peevishness, bookishness, and libido — along with more than a little of the author's biography.

("Don't invent, just remember" was the mantra, dosed with characteristic irony, that Roth claimed to follow while at work on a later opus.)

Together they formed an archetype, which invited one of the louder criticisms of Roth: his tendency to unspool similarly pitched battles of identity in book after book, decade after decade. Levov, a mythically goy-faced specimen, arrives as something of a rebuttal. No one else from Weequahic "possessed anything remotely like the steep-jawed, insentient Viking mask of this blue-eyed blond born into our tribe as Seymour Irving Levov." They call him "the Swede."

Athletic, reserved, well-adjusted, decent: What an odd duck he is. Consider that, as a teenager, Portnoy harbors vain dreams of scrubbing away his Jewishness and passing under the name "Alton C. Peterson" (the *C* stands for *Christian*) to win over a girl. (What would he answer, he wonders gloomily, "when she asks about the middle of my face and what happened to it?") Zuckerman, Roth's longtime surrogate, dryly tells a friend, after she accuses him of trying to conceal being "a Newark Yid" in *Zuckerman Unbound*: "I'm afraid there are other distinguishing features."

Pitted against their own bodies, families, and identities, these distinctly Rothian figures were sometimes called "self-hating Jews," an epithet that can obscure the depth of their attachment. Roth dealt with Judaism most handily in its ethnic dimensions — appearance, folkways, patterns of speech, neighborhoods, communal and familial obligation — and so his Jews were "self-hating": When they disdained being Jewish, they were incapable, for reasons of fixed situation and physiognomy, of disclaiming it. (*Involuntarily committed* might have been a better term.) Such a dynamic nourished the rich, energetic, and hilarious identity crises that often seemed indivisible from Roth's brilliance as a writer and that helped make the intellectual-neurotic Jew a cultural icon.

With the Swede, Roth swerves, with crisp ambition, into portraying conventionality, and the embrace of it by a Jew who is uniquely unbound.

Armed with a fortune from Newark Maid, the family's glove factory, he stakes a claim to an 18th-century farmhouse in Old Rimrock, New Jersey, a wealthy, WASPy outlying suburb. Together with Dawn, his Irish-stock, beauty-queen wife, they set up a hobby cattle farm, where they raise Merry, their daughter and only child. What could go wrong? "She's post-Catholic, he's post-Jewish, together they're going to go out there to Old Rimrock to raise little post-toasties," Jerry Levov, the Swede's brother, summarizes decades later.

Jerry delivers that tidy line to Zuckerman — who narrates the book, back on the scene for the first time in a decade — toward the end of an elaborate frame narrative that sets the novel in motion. Contemplatively paced and studded with muscular, fulminating yarns that brim with staccato psychological import, *Pastoral* was the first installment in what would be called the America trilogy, and it was part of a late-career turn toward grander historical scope by Roth, perhaps intended to fill out a Nobel Prize résumé. (In vain, though *Pastoral* did score the '98 Pulitzer for fiction.) Levov is more static than the usual Roth hero, or at least he lacks the usual hang-ups. Using Zuckerman (who, having lately undergone prostate surgery, is more reluctant than usual to spill his own neuroses on the page) to tell the story allows Roth to put a layer between his pen and the Swede's considerably flatter mind, which doesn't have the old familiar pitted contours and byways.

"He loved America. Loved being an *American*," says Zuckerman. Few boxes go unchecked. We meet the Swede in high school, as a strapping three-sport letterman. Then he's a Marine, then a drill sergeant on Parris Island. Marries Miss New Jersey, 1949. ("A shiksa. Dawn Dwyer. He'd done it.") Takes over his father's

A bard of postwar liberalism, Roth possessed a genius for condensing and animating the unresolved core of the American order — the clash between public and private interest, individuality and group duty — in his drama and characters.

business, signs paychecks for a small army of glovers. Moves out to Old Rimrock, into the pastoral authenticity of a 170-year-old stone house — about as old as the country — with beams carved of oak, on Arcady Hill Road. It had a Christmas tree. Pommard. Hoffritz knives.

In retrospect, Zuckerman goes on to assess, "he had tried all his life never to do the wrong thing." But even in Old Rimrock, the ferment of the 1960s trickles in, and teenaged Merry — first churlish, then combative, then explosive — gets carried away in the rougher currents of the New Left. Radicalized by the Vietnam War, she eventually goes postal, blowing a hole in their lives and running off into hiding. A related form of violence soon descends on the Newark Maid plant, and the Swede deserts the city entirely. (Manufacturing is offshored to Puerto Rico.) Years pass, filled with devastated searching, until the Swede, roused by a message from Merry's old comrade, finds his daughter, now a convert to Jainism, subsisting in a Newark slum near a highway overpass. She refuses to come home, and he cannot bring himself to compel her to.

"Mugged by reality" became, around this time, a famous refrain of disillusionment, and Irving Kristol's phrase captures something of the arc of the Swede's life. (It does not appear in

Roth often took as his subject men who were in some permanent way at odds with their world and yet irrepressibly drawn into it. In *American Pastoral*, the limitations are gone, only to leave behind a husk.

the novel.) But the thrust of the dictum was its sense of political awakening. The Swede does not take it up; haunted, searching, he never finds resolution. He absorbs the historical turns of the period's Jewish Americans — flight to the suburbs, economic advancement, assimilation, globalization — with little of the nascent neocons' canniness. And pages of imagined conversations with Angela Davis fail to move him in the other direction. He's left shattered.

The book's final section, subtitled "Paradise Lost," orbits around a dinner party, set during the heat of the Watergate hearings, that bursts into violence. The Swede is ambushed by news of Dawn's affair with a baronial WASP he has dubbed "Mr. America." The blow suggests that assimilation, taken to the extreme, is a fool's game.

Has time borne this out? Post-ethnic assimilated Jews are, today, hardly news. The thrill that once simmered in the idea of WASPs giving way to Jews in the American heights has long since dried up; anyone who has taken a look at CEO lists or the East Hampton real estate market can see that this is an accomplished fact (if one that is provoking newly vocal resentment). And in many circles, the airing of concerns about intermarriage has subsided, shifting toward acceptance and embrace.

A bard of postwar liberalism, Roth possessed a genius for

condensing and animating the unresolved core of the American order — the clash between public and private interest, individuality and group duty — in his drama and characters. For Zuckerman, for Portnoy, the game was comparatively well-defined, and the limits of assimilation were spelled out, most emblematically, by their very facial features. These constraints don't bind the Swede, who is just about free to leave it all behind.

Each passing decade may bring an ever richer crop of Swede Levovs. But Roth suggests that what looks like stability and success, obtained through ultra-Americanization, is not as sustainable as it appears and that intergenerational upheaval is never far off.

Today's Swede is not so hard to sketch. He enters middle age in high, perhaps higher, suburbia, living in an enormous new-build mansion, working in private equity where he squeezes cash out of the remaining Newark Maids of the world. His well-being is measured with full-body Prenuvo scans, his esteem assured by an accumulation of expensive vehicles, a Purple Label wardrobe, elite airline status, the reassuring weight of a metal Amex in his pocket. Highly competitive, he holds in his hands what he identifies as comfort and security, while maintaining vanishingly few of the staples that set apart the lives of his ancestors. And Merry? Black-and-white keffiyeh wrapped around her shoulders, trust fund in her name, Jewish Voice for Peace reposted on her Instagram, residing in the Columbia encampment, the figure comes easily into view.

A classic feature of the domestic drama is to take the hot water that a secondary character, usually a family member, finds herself in and use it to turn up the heat on the central mover. (And Roth, it must be said, often formulated women characters as caricatures or little more than devices to push and prod his men.) The weight of the mortification, then, falls on the Swede. Before she cracks up, Merry takes her arguments to passionate extremes, only for the Swede, outstripped as a father, to fumble for anything more than bromides in response. Mugged by reality, his response is — *nothing*.

With his daughter gone and his wife set to move into a new house she's building with Mr. America, a glassy postmodern creation à la Philip Johnson, what will come of the Swede's well-planned patrimony? Who will inherit the Swede? Roth often took as his subject men who were in some permanent way at odds with their world and yet irrepressibly drawn into it. In *American Pastoral*, the limitations are gone, only to leave behind a husk.

And yet a book, with its simple characterizations and brutal moral themes, a mulishly conventional protagonist who does the right and propitious thing according to custom and yet cannot outrun the twisting knife of fate—*American Pastoral*, for what it leaves of Roth's familiar tones and types, is not at great variance with a much older Jewish textual tradition. This is Roth's swing at an American book of Job—a name he nods at in the opening pages—a formulation set in a largely post-religious, post-ethnic, capitalist culture, in which the shepherded flock is the glove factory, the ordering force is American liberalism. Roth personally extolled this ideal more than once, in part because it fostered his life's freedoms and furnished the elements of his fiction, in the foundational tension between individual liberty and communal obligation, and the conflicts of identity and obligation that ensue.

But in a Roth story, faith and righteousness tend to mark the territory of fools and nuisances, due for their comeuppance. The Swede is a man who runs the table, makes the fullest possible embrace of his freedoms, thinks himself blameless and upright, fearing the American gods and shunning their evils. And where does it get him? "Perhaps they were sinning in their feasting" was Dostoevsky's gloss on Job. We get something similar in the Swede. Roth refrains from picking an ideological winner here. Instead—writing at a time, the late Nineties, that increasingly looks like the peak of confidence in the American order and the

position of Jews in it, when popular writers saw fit to posit an "end of history" and that "the Jews had no greater enemy than themselves" — he reminds us that history is not neat and that it always has a loser. "He had tried all his life never to do the wrong thing," says Zuckerman, "and that was what he had done." ✳

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Letters

Readers respond

The letters below respond to our Aspiration issue of Winter 2026. Additional letters can be found on our website at sapirjournal.org/letters. We welcome your responses to the current issue at letters@sapirjournal.org.

To the Editor:

I TYPICALLY agree with Mijal Bitton 120 percent. Her scholarship is invaluable, and her voice is essential in American Jewish discourse. It pains me to write this letter, but I feel compelled when I believe she gets something fundamentally wrong.

By basing her argument on Ashkenazi versus Sephardic paradigms, Bitton has undermined what could have been a powerful thesis about Jewish communal resilience. Instead of focusing on actual communal attributes—family-centeredness, institutional boundaries around peoplehood, embodied spirituality, and internal confidence—she's wedded these insights to ethnic categories that play into the very stereotypes that have plagued our people for generations.

The well-worn canard that Ashkenazim prioritize assimilation while Sephardim value preservation isn't just reductive—it's historically false. Syrian Jewish insularity in Brooklyn developed in America, not medieval Damascus. Persian Jews in Los Angeles have

pursued the very elite institutional validation that Bitton critiques. Hasidic communities (which Bitton mentions only in passing) exhibit precisely the "Sephardic" characteristics she champions, yet they're thoroughly Ashkenazi. The communal orientations she describes don't map cleanly onto geography or ethnicity—they map onto choices about Jewish continuity.

More troublingly, this binary reinforces destructive intra-Jewish divisions at precisely the moment we need unity. When Bitton writes that the next century must be Sephardic, she inadvertently suggests that one Jewish community must triumph over another rather than that all Jews might benefit from certain communal practices. This gets us nowhere.

The real question isn't whether we become "more Sephardic" but whether American Jews—regardless of origin—will prioritize family transmission over institutional outsourcing, peoplehood boundaries over radical inclusivity, embodied practice over intellectualized distance, and internal confidence over external validation. These are choices available to any Jewish community willing to make them.

Bitton's four reforms are genuinely valuable. But they didn't need ethnic branding. By tying them to Sephardic identity rather than to communal choices that transcend ethnic origin, she's made it harder for the very Ashkenazi Jews she hopes to reach to embrace these practices without feeling they're abandoning their own heritage.

Our shared Jewish values—*ahavat Yisrael*, commitment to am Yisrael, reverence for tradition, and confidence in our covenant—belong to all of us. Let's focus on strengthening those bonds rather than perpetuating divisions that serve no one.

JONATHAN ZEMMOL
Brooklyn, New York

Mijal Bitton responds:

Y RECENT essay "The Future Is Sephardic" seems to have struck a nerve—and the conversation it has generated is exactly what I hoped for.

Jonathan Zemmol's critique cuts deepest of those

that I've received, so let me be direct: He's right that I shouldn't essentialize, which is why I referred to the Ashkenazi–Sephardic binary I drew as "admittedly provocative and exaggerated." But his objection goes further—it implicitly questions whether group-level cultural patterns are meaningful at all, and whether the behaviors I describe are distinctively Sephardic rather than broadly Jewish. Here, I'll push back. Sociology and cultural anthropology rest on exactly this premise: that we can identify meaningful trends within groups without claiming that every individual conforms to them or that other groups cannot share the same traits.

American Jewish life needs to reorient around family, peoplehood, and the kind of internal confidence that doesn't collapse when the surrounding culture turns hostile. Call it Sephardic, call it something else—if we agree on the direction, *dayenu*. It is that shared inheritance—not the label—that I'm fighting for.

To the Editor:

AROM ARIAV is right to sound the alarm about Israel's brain drain, but not every departure is a loss. For a small country, scientific excellence depends on deep integration into the global research ecosystem.

Training abroad has always been central to Israel's academic success, allowing Israeli scholars to develop expertise in emerging specialties and build enduring professional ties. These relationships become strategic assets for Israel: colleagues in academia, industry, and government whose understanding of Israel comes from direct collaboration rather than distant narratives.

Now more than ever, Israel benefits from having its best and brightest working side by side with peers around the world. The challenge, therefore, is not preventing Israelis from leaving. It is ensuring that movement abroad becomes a cycle of learning, connection, and return.

In our experience, those ties endure when they are embedded in not only Israeli networks but also broader academic communities that actively value collaboration with Israel. This requires deliberate effort: cultivating vibrant communities of Israeli scholars and allies at leading institutions while creating credible pathways for return.

In the aftermath of October 7, we co-founded Kalaniyot, a faculty-led initiative that supports Israeli scholars in advanced training and collaborative research at top universities around the world and that brings together a broad community of faculty and institutional partners who actively welcome Israeli collaboration.

What began as a refuge from campus hostility soon revealed a deeper opportunity to build a global intellectual community where connections to Israel are strengthened. Launched at MIT, the initiative has expanded to chapters at universities including Harvard, Dartmouth, Penn, Columbia, Cornell, and USC, and it continues to grow. These international networks accelerate discovery and lay the foundation for long-term collaboration and innovation.

We have already seen Kalaniyot Fellows return to Israel to establish laboratories, bringing with them cutting-edge expertise and global collaborations. Just as important, many in our community remain deeply engaged with Israel while abroad by co-supervising students, building joint research programs, and strengthening institutional ties.

Programs that support Israelis training abroad should therefore be seen not as concessions to brain drain but as investments in Israel's long-term intellectual infrastructure.

Israel's greatest resource has always been its human capital. Sending Israeli scholars abroad is an investment that, if managed wisely, can yield extraordinary returns. What looks like brain drain can become brain circulation—and ultimately brain gain.

PROF. OR HEN & PROF. ERNEST FRAENKEL
Kalaniyot co-founders and faculty members at
the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

To the Editor:

WAS a student activist before I became an educator. What drew me then, and what I have spent decades since trying to teach, was not a story of Jewish suffering—though there was plenty of that. It was a story of Jewish defiance and the hope that made that defiance possible.

In "How to Teach the Jewish Story," Dara Horn has done us a great service by naming the trap. Too much of what passes for "positive" Jewish education quietly accepts antisemitism's core premise: that Jews must prove their worthiness to a skeptical world. Horn is right that this is a surrender dressed as a celebration. But her most important insight—that the real Jewish story is one of principled nonconformity, of refusing to bow to tyrants—is not merely a framework for the future. It is also a living history that most Jewish educators have simply overlooked.

The Soviet Jewry movement is the case study that Horn's thesis is waiting for.

Consider what this movement actually was. The refuseniks—Jews inside the Soviet Union who applied to emigrate, were denied, and then refused to disappear quietly—were doing something that should sound familiar to anyone who has read Horn's account of Daniel standing before Nebuchadnezzar. They were saying, to one of the most powerful tyrants in human history: *We will not serve your god, we will not worship your statue*. They did not beg to be accepted. They did not argue that they were useful. They demanded their rights as Jews, on Jewish terms, and they paid an enormous personal price for it. Ida Nudel, standing before a Soviet court that had already decided her fate, did not plead for mercy. Her closing statement needs no commentary: "I have learned to walk proud and erect, both as a human being and a Jewess.…These seven years will warm my heart with the knowledge that my life has not been without purpose."

And then there were people like me—ordinary teenagers and college students who organized, rallied, adopted refusenik families, and marched on Washington in numbers that shook a superpower. We were not Jews justifying our existence or proving our worthiness to a non-Jewish public. We were Jews—young Jews—acting for Jews, animated by hope, with the full conviction that it was the right thing to do and that it could work.

It did work. That is the point.

The Soviet Jewry movement is a story of collective action, Jewish solidarity across every denominational and political line, and young people discovering that standing up to tyranny is not only possible—it is their inheritance. It embodies every quality that Horn argues Jewish education should cultivate: curiosity about Jewish nonconformity, pride in Jewish agency, and the visceral understanding that Jewish civilization is not a museum piece but a living force.

I would urge every Jewish educational organization seeking to empower young Jews with pride in their heritage to look closely at this history. The materials exist. The archives are preserved. The story is extraordinary. All that is needed is the will to tell it.

SIMON KLARFELD

Executive Director, Soviet Jewry Movement Education Project

Dara Horn responds:

AM GRATEFUL to Simon Klarfield for his comment, especially because I have great news for him: The Tell Institute's curriculum covers exactly what he proposes. One of our case studies is specifically about Soviet anti-Zionism and the refusenik movement. It is long past time to make the basic facts of this history common knowledge. ✳

To read and share these and other letters online, scan the QR code.

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וַיִּרְאוּ אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתַחַת
רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לִבְנַת הַסַּפִּיר
וּכְעֶצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לָטֹהַר׃

— שמות כד:י

For American Jews, public service is not just a civic necessity; it is a religious imperative born of *hakarat ha-tov*, literally translated as 'recognizing the good,' more colloquially, showing gratitude.

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Americans cannot hope to regain our old resilience unless we know what resilient looks like. The sooner we learn from the Israelis, the faster we might save ourselves from what, increasingly, we risk becoming.

BRET STEPHENS · 26

Even the short end of the American stick is a position that other nations and societies over the centuries could have beheld only with envy.

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It is deeply naïve to think it would be a good idea to let the government pick and choose who enjoys the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

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As we stand at the threshold of an AI-driven world ...we must not lose sight of the importance of placing a master pedagogue at the center of a serious education.

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Third Worldism is proving as seductive to today's second-generation American Muslim radicals as socialism, Communism, and anarchism were to the second-generation Jewish radicals of the 1920s and 1930s.

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