Paul Croce
History and American Studies, Stetson University
421 N Woodland Boulevard, Box 8274, DeLand, FL 32720
386-822-7533; PCroce@stetson.edu

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Shifting the Spotlight in the Middle East:
Lifting the Liberal Veil on US Support for Israel

Since its modern founding in 1948, Israel has received bipartisan endorsement for US economic and military support through seasons of war, terrorism, and territorial expansion. That endorsement, however, has recently become contested; most prominently, the movement for Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) of Israel, for allegedly enacting "policies that violate [the] human rights" of Palestinians, has gained some traction in the US, including at the American Studies Association (ASA), and with still more support in other countries. While the positions of the ASA and BDS have been thoroughly criticized at the highest echelons of academia and politics, even these steps—and the vociferous reactions to them—show that for the first time in its recent national history, Israel is not immune to American partisanship.[1] This presentation offers an overview of early Jewish migration to Palestine and Arab responses to their growing numbers; during this time, precedents were set that would shape later ideological formation on both sides. This is a story of the intermingling of history and ideology, with depictions of the history shaping ideology and ideology making selective use of those historical memories; and this is a story of the creation of the contemporary militancy among both Israelis and Palestinians. The standoff is rooted in the depth and appeal of their respective grievances, about Palestinian anti-Semitism and Jewish displacement of Arabs, and it persists with failure to comprehend the historical narratives that start with

their different readings of history, which have fed into and have been reinforced by the political polarization in the United States. The role of historical memory is particularly potent in the dynamics of Middle East policies, where history and ideology have produced a polarization that veers into despair about any resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian standoff. Just as the American pragmatist philosopher William James suggests that not to decide is to decide, so too this hopelessness is a position, this is an ideology that ironically both sides share, and it is the direct result of this history especially as selected by the players in the Middle East with major reflection on and support from cultural and political groups in the US.[2]

1-Identity Claims on the Jordan

William Faulkner's solemn saying that "the past isn't over. It isn't even past," is often used to remind Americans to pay attention to history, but Israelis and Palestinians need no reminding.[3] The current deep divisions between them have roots in dramatically different readings of history, with each event interpreted to shape identity. Israelis insist that the Jews have historic claims to the lands of Israel from before the Roman dispersal of Jews out of the Land of Israel during the first century of the Common Era (CE), most notably with destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and definitively in the year 135. By contrast, the Israeli argument continues, the Palestinians have no such claim: they are people from other lands in the Middle East, and even their name is derived from the Philistines who are no longer a people in this area; and the present native inhabitants could readily move to other Arab territory. Therefore the identification of Palestinians with the territory of Israel is a historical myth promoted to justify their claims, but with no basis in history. Palestinians counter that their history in the region goes back to the

mingling of people in this crossroads land, including Jews and Christians, with their name beginning under the Romans, and their predominant Muslim affiliations beginning in the era of Islamic expansion in the 7th century; and they cite their own history of oppression with Christian Crusaders in the 11th to 13th centuries, Ottoman rule from 1516, and control by the British as the Mandate for Palestine after the First World War.[4] Each narrative contains some truth: Palestinian identity has not always had a sharp coherence, with Palestinians often defined in relation to others, especially in subordination, but their inchoate identity, like that of many non-Western nations, was partly imposed and partly in gradual development during modern times. While Jews make claims to being the indigenous people of the territory based on a deep history, Palestinians claim this status in more recent history and up to the present.

These different historical narratives have also shaped how each group would perceive recent history. The modern attraction of Jews to the region emerged from the simultaneous push of nationalism and anti-Semitism in Europe and pull of their own nationalism. Prejudice toward Jews was not new to this era, and it often veered into tragic and aggressive violence. For centuries, Jews were restricted from mainstream society and thrived independently, often in demarcated ghettoes and shtetls. Even with Jewish emancipation into the mainstream starting in the Enlightenment, Jews maintained their outsider status, which fueled resentments within their majority gentile neighbors in their respective home countries, especially with the rise of nationalist sentiments during the nineteenth century. The increasing appeal of identification with one's nation, often amplified by perceptions of racial commonality, encouraged a modern racialized version of anti-Semitism. Many Jews responded to perceptions that they constituted a separate

nation within their home nations by assimilating culturally and adopting liberal secular outlooks or the modernizations of Reform Judaism. However, their persisting sense of distinctiveness encouraged the formation of a nationalism of their own. Zionism emerged as a Jewish nationalism with reference to the homeland of their deep history. A kind of spiritual Zionism, especially under the inspiration of Asher Ginsberg, who became known as Ahad Ha'am, emphasized migration to Palestine as a "spiritual center" and "safe retreat" to resemble what would become the Vatican for Catholics rather than a separate Jewish state. He did not rule out the formation of such a state, but he placed such possibilities into an indefinite future and as a distinctly lower priority to stimulating the spiritual basis of Jewish identity, often compromised in European assimilation. And in the immediate, Ha'am recognized that Jewish migration to Palestine would put them in contact with another people already living there; he predicted that if the Jewish population "develops to the point of encroaching upon the native population, they will not easily yield their place."[5]

Theodor Herzl would advocate a different version of Zionism. He came of age as an assimilated Jew in cosmopolitan Vienna. The rising tide of Anti-Semitism encouraged his doubts about the strength of the liberal ideals of his youth. His turn toward Zionism took on a political emphasis, with his hope for Judenstaat ("The Jewish State"), the name of his 1896 manifesto, envisioning his hope for a political homeland, as the only reasonable solution to the "Jewish question." Carrying his liberal beliefs into his Zionism, Herzl envisioned the new nation in secular terms, with separation of church and state, emerging with the purchase of Palestinian lands. Legal title to land would settle the questions of sovereignty, thus avoiding the resentments of current residents, he predicted

optimistically; in 1902, he even wrote a fictional account, Alt-neuland ("Old-Newland") set in his hoped-for Jewish state in 1923, with a native Palestinian gushing that "The Jews have enriched us. Why should we be angry with them?" Political Zionism would become the predominant outlook for emigration of Western Jews to Palestine, arriving in steadily increasing numbers especially with the spur of growing anti-Semitism in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe; the Jewish population of Palestine swelled to about 84,000, but even these growing numbers only amounted to 11% of the population in 1922.[6]

The actual Palestinians did not respond so positively, even as many were willing to sell land to the emigres. They tended to associate Zionism with imperial control, especially as Ottoman power declined and British power rose in the region; Herzl even used colonial language in promoting the European migrations and presenting the eventual state as "an outpost of civilization against barbarism." The Arabs in Palestine viewed the Zionists as Europeans people with European connections seeking to establish an outpost of European culture. This impression gained reinforcement when the political and spiritual wings of Zionism allied in 1899, with the adoption of a political goal of a Jewish state, and a cultural decision to teach Hebrew in the schools for Jews migrating to a land of Arabs. These political goals and assertions of separate identity alienated the native population. Another politically oriented Zionist, Aaron David Gordon, brought a socialist emphasis on the redemptive power of manual labor; he is best known as a founder of the kibbutz, the Jewish communal settlements, which had the side effect of reducing social interaction with local Palestinians. Some political Zionists with socialist leanings, supported a binational Palestine, one nation with multiple regions and identities,

on the model of Belgium, Canada, and Switzerland, but most including Gordon did not. He emphasized that Jews, as a beleaguered ethnic group, require a distinct haven of their own. He also recognized that native Arabs have “a historical right to the country,” but the Jewish right is “undoubtedly greater”: the “creation of the Bible alone give[s] us a perpetual right over the land in which we were so creative”; by contrast, “the people that came after us did not create such works in this country,” so “Arabs have long ago forfeited their title.” This view of uplift of the land of Jewish ancestry also carried over to Jewish expectation that the greater education, wealth, and political connections of European Jews would serve to improve “the well-being of the entire country,” as Herzl said in response to a worried Palestinian leader Ysuf al-Khalidi in 1899. Leaning on Arab historical memory, another local leader, Negib Azoury remembered firmly that “it is not the first time that the interests of Europe in the Mediterranean have caused a stir in the Arab lands.” The Zionist slogan made Palestinians feel downright invisible, “A land without a people, for a people without a land.” The Arabs perceived that their worst fears were coming to pass during the First World War when Zionists presented their hopes for a homeland as a part of British strategic interests in the Middle East, with Jewish strength in Palestine making their presence part of a supportive defensive perimeter near Egypt and the Suez Canal. British Prime Minister Lloyd George had both a sentimental loyalty to Jews from his Biblical education in a Baptist household, and a geopolitical interest in Jewish Palestine for support of the British Empire, but it was these very expectations that reinforced the Palestinian belief that these migrants were agents for spreading European civilization.[7]

Palestinian critiques of Zionism, for fear of Jewish encroachment on their land, veered into anti-Semitism. In their fear of yet another form of European imperialism, some Palestinians adopted other European imports, the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that were becoming increasingly prevalent in Europe. The public face of Palestinians was in defense of their rights against Zionists marching under the wings of British imperialism, but the Jews perceived their attitudes and actions as anti-Semitic, especially with accusations about Palestinian leader Amin al-Husseini's sympathies with national socialism. And indeed, for average citizen and for political leaders seeking their support, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism readily mingled into a perfect storm: Palestinians feared displacement, hence opposition to the Jewish Zionists making those plans; those fears veered into frustration expressed as anti-Semitism; Jews sought a haven from anti-Semitism, hence they feared its resurgence; and they sought affiliation with the British Empire as a means toward their goal. A British investigation of a 1920 riot in Jaffa detected "a feeling among the Arabs of hostility to the Jews," based upon their "Zionist policy [on] immigration"; fierce disagreement with the policies mingled with hostility toward its "Jewish exponents" to amplify Palestinian feelings of marginalization and insecurity.[8]

The crucial and famous Balfour Declaration provides evidence for both narratives. In 1917, while Britain was making little progress during the Great War, Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour wrote to British Zionist Association President Lord Walter Rothschild to express the British government's "sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations" for the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." Many factors went into the making of this historic document: Balfour was at once

supportive of Jewish return to Israel and concerned to prevent the arrival of too many Jewish refugees from the war-torn continent to Britain; he adopted stereotypes about Jewish talent and power, and he perceived the advantages of a Jewish presence with British sympathy in the Middle East. The importance of this connection became palpable just one month later when British marched into Jerusalem, in the heart of the Ottoman province of Palestine. However, leading British Zionist Chaim Weizmann, who had been lobbying for just such an endorsement, found the reference to "home" rather than "state" too weak; and Rothschild himself objected to the last sentence of the declaration which seemed to qualify British support on the understanding "that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine"—he thought it a gratuitous "slur on Zionism" for even suggesting the implausible "possibility of a danger to non-Zionists." The text itself was a result of internal British debate, with some in the Foreign Office indeed concerned about alienating Palestine's "indigenous population," especially for fear of losing Arab support in the Ottoman theater of the war. Strategically, Britain needed the support of Jews and Arabs. Some British officials even thought that the document was simply a creature of wartime urgency, soon to go the way of other such promises, including the 1915 letter of British high commissioner in Egypt Henry McMahon to Saudi leader sharif Hussein bin Ali promising endorsement of the "independence of the Arabs" from Ottoman rule.[9]

These qualifications and critiques did not, however, follow the public reputation of the Balfour Declaration, which was cited immediately and has been ever since, especially among Evangelical Christians, as the first step toward the creation of the modern state of Israel; and this role for the document received international legal sanction

when the League of Nations accepted the declaration as part of its decision to grant Britain legal control of the Mandate for Palestine. The Haifa Congress of Palestinian Arabs sent a petition to Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill in 1921 expressing their "energetic … protest" that "our country should be made the Jewish National Home." Citing the dispersal and mistreatment of Jews around the world, Churchill responded that such a Jewish "national centre" would be "good for the world, good for the Jews, and good for the British Empire." And he added, "good for the Arab" too for the "general diffusion of wealth and well-being" that the more cosmopolitan European Jews would bring to "advance … the social, scientific, and cultural life of the people." To most Arabs, this hopeful promise was the benign but patronizing face of cultural hierarchy; they felt that the Zionists and the British "treated them like bad children."[10]

The Balfour Declaration also transformed the local dynamics of Jews and Arabs in Palestine, amplifying their small and local disagreements into open and deeper conflict. But both were living under the nervous supervision of the British who maintained hopes for accommodation. From 1917, through the 1930s, there were riots and attacks on both sides, with each side performing appalling crimes, and each claiming slights by their British rulers. Palestinians called the incorporation of the Balfour Declaration into the League of Nations Mandatory authority a move to bypass majority sentiments in the territory itself—and to bypass Britain's own McMahon letter—and the enthusiasm of Jews for the declaration led to increased expectation of Jewish identity in Palestine and increased militancy toward Arabs, prompting Balfour himself to express an understated worry that "Zionists there are behaving in a way which is alienating the sympathies of all the other elements of the population." The Jews witnessed anti-Zionist

demonstrations and riots, and perceived that the British, backtracking from their Balfour commitment, actually supported the attacks and appeased Palestinian interests with acknowledgement of Palestinian identity, as proclaimed by the Arab National Congress in 1920. Zionists called this identity claim artificially constructed to justify the removal of Jews, while local Palestinians complained that policies supporting Jewish immigration were designed to displace them to other Arab lands, as if they were interchangeable generic Arabs. In their attempts to conciliate each side, the British effectively raised the expectations of each, fueling resentment based on contrasting expectations. Herbert Samuel, the first British High Commissioner of Palestine, who was Jewish in background and liberal in political orientation, proposed a goal of one state with two nationalities; his ideas received some support, but majority criticism on both sides, as the idea would when reappearing periodically over the next few decades. Militancy grew in popularity, with Husseini's adoption of Arab nationalism in open hostility to growing numbers of Jews in Palestine, and with Vladimir Jabotinsky, who founded the Jewish self-defense force, Haganah (Hebrew for "the Defense," which became the Israeli Defense Force or IDF). This and other militant Zionist organizations, including the Stern Group, also known as Lehi, shortened from Hebrew words meaning Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, and the Irgun Zvai Leumi, attacked Palestinians and the British, and may have collaborated with the Nazis. Many militants supported the Revisionist Party, named for the hope to revise the British plan for a Jewish homeland to include Transjordan, the territory of the British Mandate east of the Jordan River, the territory of present-day Jordan. With the formation of an independent Israeli state in 1948, the formal life of these groups ended, but their members joined Israeli institutions: many units of the Stern Group were incorporated into

the IDF, and Irgun became the basis of the Herut (Freedom) Party. Jabotinsky openly claimed that "we are seeking to colonize a country against the wishes of its inhabitants, in other words, by force"; and there is evidence of Husseini's contact with Adolph Hitler about extending the killing of Jews to the Middle East. In a polarizing setting, the extremists grew more influential.[11]

During the 1920s and 1930s, the British barely contained the tensions and outbursts of violence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The Palestinians grew more alarmed at the increases in Jewish migration; most Jews emigrating from Europe went to the US until 1920s immigration restrictions reduced those numbers to a trickle; and other countries also blocked immigration during this period. In his maniacal anti-Semitism, Adolph Hitler actually encouraged Jewish migration to Palestine in the 1930s as a way to remove them from the "Fatherland" before implementing the Nazi "final solution" in the 1940s. The Jewish population of Palestine had risen to 30% in 1936, and they were increasingly receptive to the messages of militancy in their defense because of the situation in Europe and also in Palestine. During the Arab Revolt of 1936-39 (called the Arab "terror war" and the "rebellion and general strike" by different interpreters), Husseini concentrated his power, with increasing Islamic conformity, attacks on Zionist and even moderate Arabs, and hopes to remove Jews from Palestine. As it became more clear that the Jewish presence was permanent, he led the Arabs away from both coexistence and full-scale war, turning instead to guerilla tactics and small-scale assaults, tactics that would be amplified by his successor in the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Yassir Arafat. This turn in Palestine opened the local conflict to Pan-Arab support; the campaign to push back Jewish population and power in Palestine became

part of a campaign against Jews with support throughout the region. To add tragedy to injury, the British, in one of their many attempts to conciliate their warring charges, acquiesced to Arab demands for limiting Jewish migration to Palestine at the very time when Hitler was clamping down on Jews in the German Reich. The Jews who reached Palestine before the Second World War felt more of a push from virulent anti-Semitism than the pull of Zionism; the high concentrations from highly educated Germans brought a significant economic boom to the growing Jewish population of Palestine, and a hardening of fear among Palestinians that they were being overpowered. More Arab Palestinians turned to more militant groups, such as the Young Men's Muslim Association, with explicitly Islamic rather than secular motivations, and they increasingly conflated Zionism with Western, particularly British, imperialism. These militant groups were able to appeal to the many Arabs who were displaced by Jewish purchase of land, often from absentee Arab landowners. These groups took on the negative task of armed struggle rather than the constructive steps of governance; their antagonism and actions were precisely what the Jews feared. Growing distrustful of their Palestinian neighbors and with fresh memories of victimhood in Europe encouraged Jews to support militant positions in their hoped-for homeland. By the 1940s, a perfect storm was brewing in Palestine, with each side's actions reinforcing the worst fears of both Jews and Palestinians.[12]

2-Toward Ideological Stands on the Potomac

The Second World War and the Nazi extermination of nearly six million Jews in their home country and wherever German armies advanced or gained cooperation, solidified the Jewish fear of anti-Semitism and widespread support for the Zionist call for

a political homeland, which finally came to fruition in 1948. This era also solidified the Palestinian antagonism to these trends. Even before the Holocaust, Palestinian George Antonius fully acknowledged the "disgrace" of anti-Semitism, but he maintained that "the cure for the eviction of Jews from Germany is not to be sought in the eviction of the Arabs from their homeland." That sentiment was taken in very militant directions, not just among Palestinians but throughout the Arab world. The internationalization of the local Palestinian laments about loss of land that began in the late 1930s culminated in attacks on the new state of Israel within days of the nation's founding. For Jews, the birth of nation was by contrast the fulfillment of the Zionist dream; now the ritual statement "next year in Jerusalem" was no longer just a routine incantation of hope and rallying call of solidarity with fellow member of a persecuted minority; although Israel would not yet possess that holy city, a Jewish government was now in control of the land of their ancestors. The newfound power was also the culmination of Zionist plans for buildup of numbers and strength in Palestine with the support of British imperial power. Few Zionists on the cusp of achieving their dream listened to Jewish philosopher Martin Buber in 1946 when he criticized them for relying on international agreements and alliances rather than working on relations locally right in Palestine; such "international maneuvers" would surely "stir … up Arab wrath," and even make any genuine efforts toward mutual understanding "appear suspicious to the Arabs" because appearing to cover … up the real" power maneuvers happening beyond them.[13] The Second World War brought a reshuffling of power relations worldwide, including in the Middle East. By the 1940s, the Zionists and Israelis turned to the new world superpower for support, the United States.

The US offered more unambiguous support for the Zionist cause than did Britain, in part because the moral suasion of the Holocaust's horrors resonated deeply with Americans. Palestinians had grievances, but their plight, for all its tragedies, did not reach the heights of the brutal and calculating Nazi ethnic cleansing; also the story of Palestinian losses was overshadowed by accounts of their aggressions. In addition, in polyglot America, there were far more Jews than Arabs, and while there was anti-Semitism in the United states, this majority Christian nation included many believers who took the Jewish roots of their faith as reasons to support contemporary Jews in the very land of their Savior's birth and death. This period also coincided with the growth of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union, and for the next few decades, support of Israel coincided with anti-Communism, especially when Arab states sought and received Soviet aid. The US recognized Israel within days of its founding and lent immediate and large military support when the new nation was attacked by its Arab neighbors. These and later attacks were both problems and opportunities: The State of Israel has remained in a constant state of alert with continued Arab hostility around its relatively small land mass; however, through warfare, Israel has gained control of more land. The War of Independence in 1948 added territories southeast of Gaza, the coastal north, and portions continuous with what is now generally called the West Bank, but it also brought a mass eviction of Palestinians from those very lands; their temporary refugee status has taken on virtual permanence, which has constantly fueled antagonism. The 1967 Six Day War brought another major increase in Israeli holdings, with control of the whole West Bank, including Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, although Israel and Egypt reached a separate peace for return of the Sinai, pointedly with no movement on

Palestinian issues, and with a massive infusion of US aid to Egypt, rivaling the still larger sums going to Israel. In response to their military defeats through these years, the Arabs increased their rhetorical assaults on Israel and Jews, and many among them turned to acts of terror. Israeli achievement has been a modern wonder, with the progress from a few scattered settlements into a robust nation within only a few decades; that tremendous success is an Arab nightmare bringing displacement and humiliation. As Israel was becoming the regional superpower, with the support of the American superpower, the Arabs turned to increasingly fierce methods of opposition: from attempts to block the selling of land to Jewish purchasers, to formal complaints to the authorities, to political objections, to rioting, rebellion, and terror.[14] This of course does not describe every Palestinian, but by the late twentieth century, with those other avenues seemingly exhausted, terror became for many the weapon of last resort. With no hope of achieving any of their goals in the face of much greater power, they use the weapons of the weak, terror as small-scale warfare.

I turn from early history to contemporary standoff because the early years established precedents which set the framework for contemporary ideological postures, in the Middle East and increasingly in the United States as well. The first years of Israeli nationhood brought a hiatus to those divisions, at least in the US, which supported Israel from both sides of the political spectrum, just as most Americans felt a bipartisan consensus against Communism. After the end of the Cold War, and especially in the last five-to-ten years, as American culture and politics have in general become more polarized, bipartisan support for Israel has begun to fray, with increasing numbers of Americans turning their support away from Israel, especially among liberals and young

people; meanwhile, Republicans have grown nearly unanimous in support of Israel. In the aggregate, Americans still show majority support for Israel; the change is in the split on ideological and generational lines. In the face of recent Israeli policies and the responses of the Palestinian Authority, the quasi-state that governs Palestinians in Israeli-occupied territory, the narratives of the early years have appeared on the US landscape often steering ways of looking at the contemporary situation, with American conservatives and liberals showing increasing splits over Israel and Palestine.

In modern centuries, liberals have led the fight against anti-Semitism. Enlightenment universality of rights cut across ties of ethnicity, and secular impulses defied the claims of particular religions. Liberals were strongly opposed to prejudice against Jews, or members of any other group based on ethnicity; and while they would not be likely to support the particulars of Jewish orthodoxy, they supported freedom of religion for this and all minority groups. In fact, the liberal ethos became an intellectual and cultural haven for many educated Jews, especially during the early-to-middle twentieth century. Another strand of liberalism, coming out of the New Left in the 1960s, grew restless with the ideological divide defined by anti-Communism, citing the greater significance of divisions between poor countries beleaguered by the imperial power of Western nations, in the form of colonial legacies or economic subordination. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Israelis gaining support based on anti-Semitism and Palestinians making reference to imperialism, set one liberal ideal in contest with another. In the language of liberalism, the decreasing liberal support for Israel shows the increasing traction of anti-colonial thinking, or put positively, the increasing appeal of self-determination. The hope of many early Zionists for bringing civilization and uplift

to the undeveloped Palestinian people reinforced this trend, suggesting the attitude of a group dominating and patronizing toward its inferiors. The recent writings of Juan Cole and Ira Chernus have made a case for equating the situation of Palestinians with the fate of Native Americans in the face of American Western expansion on the North American continent, with cultural identity undercut and loss of territory in the face of newcomers fulfilling their own ideals.[15] By contrast, the Zionist and Israeli turn toward militarism from the 1930s and with the state of Israel on steady alert, appeals directly to conservative sentiments, especially the Neo-Conservatives with their emphasis on peace through strength, with security serving as the leading edge of democratization and uplift. The neo-Conservatives won support in the US on just these terms for the Gulf War of the early 1990s, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003; many liberals objected to these wars because they were waged before or in defiance of diplomatic efforts, and because they doubted that there would be more peaceful times on the other sides of these shows of strength. The same types of arguments and actions appear in the Israeli-Palestinian standoff, with conservatives endorsing Israeli crackdowns on Palestinian terrorists, and liberals not wanting to support terrorism, but hoping for more diplomacy and more action to prevent the hopelessness leading to aggression, and the hopelessness of both sides.

An immediate flashpoint between Israel and the Palestinians has been the construction of Israeli settlements on the west Bank. Liberals increasingly see these actions as unnecessary provocations of Palestinian anger by touching the sore wound begun over a century ago when Jewish migrants began buying land around them. Now the power of the Israeli Defense Force seems to march in the wake of that legacy of

Zionist economic strength. As the number of Israelis in settlements grew to over half a million, the contrasting ideologies reached flashpoints. For many of the Israeli settlers, these territories are prime real estate, within commuting distance to jobs in Israel; the greater prosperity of the Jews compared to the surrounding population adds an extra irritant to the Palestinian resentment of recent displacements that repeat patterns set in motion much earlier. The two sides have engaged in asymmetrical warfare between the Israelis in military control of the area, and Palestinian resorting to harassment or terrorist attacks; and the Israelis have built a wall and checkpoints for sheer defensive purposes. Some Palestinians sprayed graffiti on one portion of the wall with words designed to appeal to liberal sentiments: "Ich bin ein Berliner," words that recall John Kennedy's defiant stand in support of West Berliners when the Soviet Union built the Berlin Wall in 1963; but to the conservative outlook, the wall is a security necessity.[16]

Israeli interpretations of the wall and the settlements on the West Bank begin with the events of the early years. Caroline Glick, who is both an editor at the Jerusalem Post and a Senior Fellow at the Center for Security Policy in Washington, DC, offers a representative story line. First, the name "West Bank" is a result of the nation of Jordan annexing the territory in 1950, and bestowing a name that would associate that land west of the Jordan River with their nation east of the Jordan. Instead, Glick uses the names from ancient times, Judea in the south of the West Bank and Samaria in the north. Glick roots rightful Israeli claims to these lands in international law; in particular, the League of Nations not only acknowledged Britain's pledge in the Balfour Declaration for the formation of a Jewish homeland, but also that pledge to territory of the British Mandate for Palestine included Judea and Samaria. And that pledge also included the entire land

of Jordan itself; the only reason Israel cannot claim Jordan, she continues, is that the League allowed that Britain could separate "the territories lying between the Jordan and the eastern boundary of Palestine," and indeed Britain did separate that territory with the identification of the Transjordan mandate in 1922, the legal basis for the creation of the nation of Jordan in 1946. There was no such "exit clause" for Judea and Samaria, and in fact, Glick maintains, the legal right of Britain to possession of this land (and the land of Israel itself) carried forward to the state of Israel when it became independent. In particular, the legal principle of "uti possidetis juris," meaning "as you lawfully hold," gives sanction to "old administrative boundaries" as the "new international boundaries." Because the "West Bank" is legally part of Israel, the settlements are simply internal migrations within one country, the equivalent of new developments and infrastructure in a new neighborhood; and Palestinian demands for their removal are not only legally nonbinding, but also they constitute an unjust hope for wholesale eradication of the Jewish presence there. Palestinians make their case for the illegality of the settlements based on United Nations resolutions, which are not legally binding, but still more substantially on the UN partition plan in 1948, which they say superseded the actions of the defunct League. Glick maintains that there is no "perfect claim to sovereignty," but Israel has the "better claim" because "there was never a Palestinian Arab state to claim sovereignty." Moreover, while the Palestinians have been "exercising self-rule over these areas since 1994 through the Palestinian Authority," this status "does not equal a right to territorial sovereignty." To Palestinians, this argument constitutes a continued legal punishment for prior powerlessness, and their narrative grows from that grievance: Contemporary Israelis deny that there is a Palestinian people; there never was a

Palestinian state because the people of that land were colonized by imperial powers; and the British empire decided to support the eventual statehood of the recent arrivals to their land. To Palestinians, these legalistic claim brought Buber's warnings to life; the Israeli arguments have seemed like the petulant claims of unruly guests.[17] The contrasting interpretations of history have entered the alternative legal narratives, keeping the sides in on-going standoff.

The way each side argues about the territory between Jordan and Israel has developed appeal, respectively, among liberal and conservative Americans. There is considerable liberal support for Israel based on the tragic history of Jewish mistreatment; and while liberals object to terrorism, they are likely to see it as a product, at least in part, of Israeli military power and of Palestinian hopelessness. These points of understanding without full support are based on progressive hopes for prevention of violence and for scaling back military action and spending in favor of diplomatic solutions, based on placing military actions in contexts of questions about social justice. By contrast, the Israeli positions reflect the realist views of many conservatives, who endorse the primary value of security and the need to counter acts of violence with force, preferably overwhelming force to make the perpetrators think twice before attacking. Israeli defense of the settlements also parallels the neo-conservative arguments for pre-emptive strikes on potential antagonists, used to justify recent American wars; in similar ways, Israelis justify the use of force especially because of the "strategic vulnerabilities" of their small nation surrounded by hostile neighbors; Judea and Samaria, along with the Golan Heights, are therefore necessary buffer regions for the existential integrity of the state of Israel.[18]

While Israeli military actions have appealed to the military wing of American conservatism, Israel's very existence has a deep resonance with another major constituency of American conservativism, the Religious Right. In fact, white Evangelicals in the US support Israel even more than do American Jews.[19] In part, this reflects a historic turn away from prejudice. This group had often harbored anti-Semitism, but especially since the 1960s, theologically conservative Evangelicals not only accepted the egalitarian message of Civil Rights, but in the case of the Jews, went still further, such as in the work of Evangelical Christian G. Douglas Young, who founded the American Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem, to use Biblical prophesy to encourage positive perspectives about Jews in general, and in particular with a pro-Israeli ideology. At the core of this Christian Zionism is Dispensational Theology, with its pre-millennialist outlook. According to this perspective, the Biblical books of Daniel and especially Revelations constitute exact predictions of human history, represented in symbolic form, up to the coming end of the world. The return of Jews to Israel is a first step in this narrative of End Times prophesy, which will culminate in Jesus's return in the final days, or the Tribulation, to confront his opponents supporting the anti-Christ in colossal battle, the Armageddon. With his victory, Jesus will bring the righteous to meet God the Father while the enemies of God are condemned to damnation. With their depiction of Jews in the vanguard of the righteous, they portray the Palestinians and their Arab and Muslim supporters in the Middle East as the enemy, with acts of terrorism as if on script for the Dispensationalist predictions. Israelis and their secular supporters in the US welcome the Evangelical endorsement of their policies, but generally with pragmatic skepticism, especially about Evangelical missionary activity in

Israel. Most notably, these political endorsements come with a major religious side effect: Dispensationalists follow their enthusiasm for Jewish return to Israel with a hope for Jewish conversion to Christianity, which of course would strip Jews of their own religious identity. Yet even Evangelicals have been subject to American culture clashes; especially young Evangelicals, already restless about the perceived rigidity of their churches on domestic issues, have likewise grown impatient with the "supersessionist" implications of Dispensationalism, the view that Christianity not only fulfills Old Testament Judaism, but also supersedes, or replaces it, enabling (Evangelical) Christians to become the modern inheritors of the Old Testament status of Jews as God's Chosen People. This Christian anti-Zionism does not involve rejection of Evangelical beliefs, and in fact, it has gained support with focus on the Christians who constitute about a tenthof the Palestinian population, but who are just as subject to Israeli policies as their majority Muslim neighbors.[20]

3-Baby Steps

The history of the growth of the state of Israel and the displacement of Palestinians has resulted in tense standoffs in the Middle East echoed by increasing ideological tension in the US. While the voices for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction of Israel remain a distinct minority in the US, they have gained increasing support, including at the ASA, based on the rising traction of Palestinian grievances about displacement even as the Israeli arguments about anti-Semitism hold significant sway. This organization for the study of American culture also explains their position because of "the unparalleled military and financial ties between the U.S. and Israel," so often assumed or ignored; and it has sought to shift the rhetorical agenda by encouraging

debate about Israeli policies and about the US role in support of them. The critics of the boycott raise important concerns since boycotts can hamper the free flow of ideas, and the boycott is directed at universities, which are indeed engaged in much cutting-edge scientific research, often with humanitarian benefits. The ASA addresses this by directing its boycott not at individuals but at institutions that partake of policies undercutting human rights—but they are small players in the whole scene, and this protest is a reminder of the limited power of the ASA. Then ASA president Curtis Marez was ridiculed for sounding frivolous when he defended the boycott by saying, "We have to start somewhere," as if it were an action of feckless meandering. However, given the prevalent American attitudes about the Middle East, this may actually be the major point: this step, or ones like it, may be like the proverbial worst steps except all others currently circulating. A constant danger in BDS, as Jewish-American businessman and frequent visitor to Israel David Reiter notes, is that it sometime slips into anti-Semitism, just as early Palestinian objections to Zionism often did as well.[21] BDS brings heated clashes between Israel supporters deeply concerned about yet-another threat to Jewish safety in a nation already on high alert, and Palestinian supporters who identify Israel as a regional superpower, actively supported by the world's superpower. In the midst of this fraught public and policy clash, the BDS movement is a small and imperfect step toward challenging longstanding inertia about a seemingly impossible situation. Support for Israel is increasingly relying on a conservative narrative; the liberal narrative of support for the victims of anti-Semitism is slipping in the face of the view that the current situation is a mess, and the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular are

untrustworthy, often based on apocalyptic religious thinking, or at least on militarist approaches to foreign policy without bipartisan support.

For decades, Americans both religious and secular, with conservative and liberal leanings, could unite in support of Israel with an updated version of the British imperial endorsement of a Jewish homeland: To most Americans, Israel represented our team in the region, with its harsh measures fulfilling American interests. This narrative was often presented as both a moral defense of Jews, even with pro-Zionist religious overtones, and as a practical necessity for sustaining American power in this sector of the globe, as represented by CentCom, or Central Command, the name of the American's military organization in the Middle East. While Israelis have reasonable concerns about security threats, the US-supported mainstream Israeli position also suggests a future of constant warfare. Fear and anger have haunted each side for decades, with tragic cycles of terror and military reprisals. The boycott or something else like it, with modest application of non-violence are baby steps, but they suggest a not-so-modest challenge to avowedly conservative realist and Dispensationalist-supported policy positions that emphasize fear of Islamic terrorists and the need for aggressive military policies.

The current mainstream narrative generally includes stories of Israel's democratic qualities and its contributions to science and culture, and finds outrage in cutting off any American support, with fear that a boycott may be only the first step down that slippery slope culminating in a threat to Israel's existence. And indeed, Israel is the most Western nations in the region; its Jewish majority is more "like us" in the "Judeo-Christian" US than most Arabs and Muslims who live in majority Third World conditions, and who in their frustration have often turned to tragic and hopeless violence against Israel and the

US. This contemporary narrative echoes the Zionist arguments of a century ago that Jewish arrival in Palestine would uplift the undeveloped locals, and it spurs Palestinian responses similar to their original reactions against loss of territory and identity, but with their objections unheeded, those reactions have been tragically amplified by internal frustration and by the support of militants. Harry Truman himself, who as president helped to shepherd Israel toward independence and stability, feared that the "underdogs" would become the "top dogs." His earthy language echoed the warning of the spiritual Zionist Ahad Ha'am, who a century ago asked his political Zionist colleagues to avoid the danger of "Eved K'imloh," Hebrew for "the slave who has become king." Beware, he added to his fellow Jews, "the Arab is not a donkey. The Arabs have pride. This could come back to haunt us."[22]

The ASA has made an attempt to shine some light on a minority narrative in American discussions. The problems in the majority narrative, in support of policies leading to constant fighting and enormous expenses in blood and treasure, do not mean that other suggestions will be perfect or even that any reasonable or thorough solution is readily apparent; but what is apparent is that certain actions will make the volatile situation worse, especially Arab terrorism and military-enforced Israeli settlements in disputed territories, both of which inflame tempers and make any steps toward any kind of peace less likely. Terrorism is the total war of the powerless, and military crackdowns are the terrorism of the powerful; Palestinians are not the only people to resort to terrorism in bleak situations: when Israel was in formation, many beleaguered Jews resorted to terrorism. The only consensus about Israel-Palestinian relations is that there is no solution in sight; what is needed now is not more proposed solutions, which likely will

be readily mocked and shot down, but the kind of proto-solutions that historical and cultural studies can provide. These ideas cannot yet work at any negotiating table or in the rooms of military or policy planners, but they may provide the basis for new thinking, starting with some awareness of each side's history, including their respective catalogue of very real grievances. The accusations of Palestinian anti-Semitism and of Israeli expansion in the spirit of Western colonialism are virtually never seen in relation. Doing so suggests that another narrative is available about both of these scourges on the people of this region. They are, after all, related forms of prejudice: anti-Semitism is a form of internal imperialism directed toward a Jewish minority in a nation or region by the majority group. With that perspective, the history of Jews arriving into Palestine leading to the formation of Israel could be read as lessons for taking action that defy both sets of grievances, with the legacy of anti-Semitism serving as a check on Jewish actions that could be perceived as bids for colonial control, and with the memory of imperialism in Arab lands serving as a check on Palestinian impulses to taint their hopes with anti-Semitism.

This narrative could spur a scholarly search for precedents of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Palestinians, as occurred especially before 1913 and for much of the 1920s, and an impetus for civil society initiatives for contemporary cooperation, which would begin with establishing personal relationships, which would need to occur before any hope of instituting political agreements. And "that's a deeper problem with BDS," David Reiter notes astutely, BDS segregates "when that is the last thing we need." After all, he continues with an obvious but often overlooked point, "Jews and Arabs aren't going anywhere, despite what extremists say." And he asks the

universal but elusive question, “How do you get everyone to live side by side?” For starters, he suggests “have religious leaders talk theology: there is so much overlap, a lot of borrowing back and forth, with practices that are similar.” Plus, that takes people away from “talking politics…. We’ll all be better off when people talk instead about their families, their schools, or whatever their jobs call for.” For example, he would like to see the new town of Rawabi, spearheaded on the West Bank by real-estate developer Bashar Al-Masri, be integrated—“make it a model.” His assessment is a reminder of the early 1960s struggles over integration in the American South; sometimes activists were most successful when changing the subject from the struggle itself. Birmingham, AL, achieved a breakthrough at a simple dinner with blacks and whites; for many, it was the first time they had ever been in the same room together. It was awkward; then someone said, “please pass the salt.” That tapped a simple something they shared: good Southern manners. As they talked, with courtesy—brittle at first—topics emerged about their everyday lives. “Where do you work? What do you do?” When a white man said he taught chemistry, and a black chemistry teacher heard him; they spent the rest of evening talking about their classes and about their problems—but problems in common, not about The Struggle, but about texts and students. They didn’t try to change each other, their school, or other institutions, much less the whole South; but they engaged in the some of the preconditions for political change. Reiter’s worst fear is that without simple contact like that, “we have a generation that only knows Intifada and the IDF, that only knows militarism.”[23] Also, while the peace in Northern Ireland is admittedly fragile, the situation is much improved from the time of The Troubles in the 1960s to 1990s. The Catholic and Protestant contenders still make robust expressions of their impassioned

feelings, and display their views publicly—even with Catholic murals displaying Palestinian flags, and Protestant neighborhoods flying Israeli flags—but now peace dominates the landscape. It's not perfect there now, but it's better.

Even the small changes in American poll numbers and the small rise in support for BDS suggest a new possibility, not for solutions, but for each ideology to face its history of contribution to their shared bleakness, a history that has made stand off the norm, with the dominant narrative of each side feeding off that history for maximum rage, and for support of ideologies satisfied with perpetual war and terror. This situation is a reminder of early 1960s when the US sleepwalked toward gradual escalation of war in Vietnam. History shaped the ideologies that created near unanimity for the righteousness of the American cause; the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution giving the president authority for military action passed both houses of Congress with only two dissenting votes. Marginal groups, especially of young people, especially at universities, questioned the cause. They were called people who brought in outside issues to intellectual inquiry, outside agitators disrupting the status quo of the business of education. In their daring to question the norms, their words, even when imperfect, now seem prophetic. By contrast, the sophisticated administrators who did not question American military action at yet another Cold War hot spot often tried to muffle the impulsive but less educated young people who dared to questions those norms. In the same way, the contemporary the BDS movement and the ASA's controversial support of it with ban on engagement with Israeli universities have been widely criticized for bringing outside issues to educational enterprises. That position offers a very liberal support of free exchange of ideas, but the focus on these academic questions distracts from the spotlight that BDS can shine on the

increasingly conservative nature of American policy support for Israeli policies. BDS may be only a first step toward shaking the consensus that had led to avoidance of dialogue about the decades-long American bipartisan support of Israeli policies. That consensus has left both Semitic groups locked in seemingly perpetual violence, and American culture and politics as the muffled partner and funder of that very standoff. There has to be a better way, and history shows that better ways often start with small and bold, if imperfect, steps.

Notes

[1] "Council Resolution on Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions," American Studies Association (December 4, 2013), http://www.theasa.net/american_studies_association_resolution_on_academic_boycott_of_israel, accessed 9/29/15; Valerie Straus, "Dozens of Universities Reject Boycott of Israel," Washington Post (December 23, 2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/12/23/dozens-of-u-s-universities-reject-academic-boycott-of-israel/, accessed 9/30/15.

[2] James's context for this thought is the role of willing in belief formation; not deciding is the posture of those who think it important that "we must avoid error." As he points out, this can avoid the danger of poor choices, but he endorses that risk over the worse problem of remaining in "suspense forever" The Will to Believe (1897), The Works of William James. Edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 24.

[3] Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, (New York: Random House, 1951), Act 1, Scene 3.

[4] Caroline Glick The Israeli Solution: A One-State Plan for Peace in the Middle East (New York: Crown Forum 2014), 179-80; John Judis, Genesis: Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014, 13-20 and 37-45, Ben Loeterman, director, "1913: Seeds of Conflict," (Washington: Public Broadcasting Service, 2014); and "Hijacking the Holy Land," Middle-East Conflict blog, http://israelpalestine-speedy.blogspot.com/2012/07/hijacking-holy-land-full-movie.html, accessed September 29, 2015.

[5] Judis, 21-24, 24.

[6] Judis, 26-28, 14.

[7] Judis, 28, 34-35, 42, 50-52; "Seeds of Conflict."

[8] Judis, 77-82; Glick, 28-29 and 42-43; "Hijacking the Holy Land."

[9] Arthur James Balfour to Lord Walter Rothschild, November 2, 1917 [the Balfour Declaration], About Education, http://history1900s.about.com/cs/holocaust/p/balfourdeclare.htm; Judis, 50 and 59-61; Maxime Rodinson, Israel: A Colonial-Settler State? (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), 46-61.

[10] Judis, 77-78; and Martin Gilbert, "'An Overwhelmingly Jewish State': From the Balfour Declaration to the Palestine Mandate," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and World Jewish Congress, n.d., http://www.jcpa.org/text/israel-rights/kiyum-gilbert.pdf, accessed September 24, 2015, 28.

[11] Judis 64-68, 82-90, and 93-99; Glick, 27-29 and 40-44, "Seeds of Conflict"; "Stern Gang," Encyclopedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com/topic/Stern-Gang, accessed

9/30/15; Irgun Zvai Leumi, Encyclopedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com/topic/Irgun-Zvai-Leumi, accessed 9/30/15; Rodinson, 65-73.

[12] Judis, 105-108; Glick, 32-33; "Seeds of Conflict"; "Hijacking the Holy Land."

[13] Antonius quoted in Judis, 115; Buber quoted in Rodinson, 67.

[14] "Egypt: US Foreign Aid," Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/egyptaid.html; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, The Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); and see Tuvia Tenenbom, Catch the Jew! (Geffen Books, 2015) for an account of patterns of land sales that have often evaded rules (56-58).

[15] David Hollinger, science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), especially pp. 3-96; Ira Chernus, "Chernus on Israel, Palestine, and the US," https://chernus.wordpress.com/; Juan Cole, "Informed Comment: Thoughts on the Middle East, History, and Religion," http://www.juancole.com/about.

[16] https://www.google.com/search?q=Ich+bin+ein+Berliner+on+West+bank+wall&biw=2049&bih=951&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0CAcQ_AUoAmoVChMI3uLzmaSgyAIVSJ2ACh1rtwsL&dpr=0.67.

[17] Glick, 172-177;Tenenbom's interview with Hanan Ashrawi, PLO spokesperson for culture and information, illustrates the Israeli dismissal and ridicule Palestinian grievances. To her central argument, that the Palestinians "have become victims of those who have been victims of European anti-Semitism," he simply says "she talks and talks and talks"; but he focuses on the transition from Christianity to Islam in the 7th century;

"this means," he emphasizes, "that after Israel's withdrawal [the diaspora forced on Jews by the Romans in the first and second centuries CE] it was the Muslims who kicked out the Christians, the truest Palestinians" (62-68). This sets up a rigid straw figure of Palestinian identity from thirteen centuries ago, and then blames the Muslims for their demise.

[18] Glick, 13.

[19] Michael Lipka, "Strong Support for Israel Cuts Across Religious Lines," Pew Research Center (February 14, 2014), http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/27/strong-support-for-israel-in-u-s-cuts-across-religious-lines/; "Us and Them: The Pummeling of Gaza Has Cost Israel Sympathy, The Economist (August 2, 2014), http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21610312-pummelling-gaza-has-cost-israel-sympathy-not-just-europe-also-among-americans.

[20] Daniel G. Hummel, "A 'Practical Outlet to Premillennial Faith: G. Douglas Young and the Evolution of Christian Zionist Activism in Israel," Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation. 25 1 (Winter 2015): 37-81, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rac.2015.25.1.37, accessed: 11/09/2015; Patricia A. Power, "Blurring the Boundaries: American Messianic Jews and Gentiles," Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions 15/1 (August 2011): 69-91, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2011.15.1.69, accessed: 11/09/2015; Carl Schrag, "American Jews and Evangelical Christians: Anatomy of a Changing Relationship," Jewish Political Studies Review17/1 and 2 (Spring 2005): 171-181; Yaakov Ariel, "An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and its Historical Significance," Modern Judaism26/1 (February 2006): 74-100; http://www.jstor.org/stable/3526840, accessed

11/09/2015; Derek Van Zile, "Evangelical Anti-Zionism as an Adaptive Response to Shifts in American Cultural Attitudes," Jewish Political Studies Review 25/1 and 2 (Spring 2013): 39-64, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23611127, accessed 9/23/15; Marcia Pally, The New Evangelicals and the Public Good (Eerdmans's Publishers, 2011); and see the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good, http://www.newevangelicalpartnership.org/, especially their "New Conversation on Christian Muslim Dialogue, http://www.newevangelicalpartnership.org/christianmuslimdialogue/.

[21] "Council Resolution on Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions," American Studies Association (December 4, 2013), http://www.theasa.net/american_studies_association_resolution_on_academic_boycott_of_israel, accessed 9/29/15; Valerie Straus, "Dozens of Universities Reject Boycott of Israel," Washington Post (December 23, 2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/12/23/dozens-of-u-s-universities-reject-academic-boycott-of-israel/, accessed 9/30/15; interview with David Reiter, Blackpool Advisors, October 1, 2015.

[22] "Seeds of Conflict"; and Max Blumenthal, Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel (New York: Perseus Books, 1913).

[23] Felice Friedson, "Rawali, New Palestinian City, Nears Fruition," Huffington Post (March 17, 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/17/rawabi-new-palestinian-city_n_2896208.html; interview with Reiter; and Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 415.