

SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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Yes, siree! America is 'exceptional'!

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We Are Having a Birthday Party — And You're Invited

AT A RABBINICAL CONFERENCE IN 1941 THREE individuals sat down and talked about a very real problem: Jewish Conscientious Objectors languishing in prisons across the United States because they objected to participation in military service. Just as sad, many of their families and friends, as well as every Jewish organization, had turned their backs on them. Only the Quakers stepped forward to offer some humane connection with these Jewish COs.

The three people who met and talked about the situation were Jane Evans, a Jewish communal worker; Rabbi Isidor Hoffman, Jewish chaplain at Columbia University, and Rabbi Abraham Cornbach of Hebrew Union College. The three decided it was time for an organization dedicated to convincing the Jewish community of its Judaic and moral obligation to Jewish men who refused to kill. Before long, many rabbis and others joined together to form the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

STEFAN MERKEN is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

Seventy-two years later the JPF is alive and well. Our first newsletter, *Tidings*, was issued in August 1942 and continued as *Shalom*, and is now our online newsletter. We are among the very few consistent voices for nonviolence and peace in American Jewish life. The JPF unites those who believe that Jewish ideals and experience provide inspiration for a commitment to life that shuns violence. Drawing upon the traditional roots of Judaism and upon its meaning in the world today, the JPF maintains an active program of draft and peace education, opposition to war, and belief in the reconciliation of Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

It's our birthday at the Jewish Peace Fellowship. And for every birthday there should be gifts! So this year, please give a few minutes of your time and your generosity (*tzedaka*) and deepen your involvement. We love to read the thoughts of our readers and invite you to send them to us for *Shalom*. You may discover other JPF members in your area. And if possible, send a donation to the JPF to insure that we continue for another seventy-two years. ☆

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The Center on Conscience & War

Coercion of Conscience

DRAFT REGISTRATION ENDED IN 1974 AND THE Selective Service System (SSS) was put into deep standby. In 1980 President Carter revived the SSS and resumed draft registration following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

At that time there was significant vocal and public resistance to registration. For many people then, and still today, the act of registering for the draft is cooperation with the war machine, and that violates their conscience. Hundreds of thousands failed to register in the early years. Even as vocal and public resistance diminished over time, the number of people who have failed to register is in the millions. According to SSS reports, the majority of those required to register do so late, and over ninety percent of those who move fail to meet their obligation to notify SSS of an address change. Offenses like these carry a potential felony conviction, up to five years in jail and a \$250,000 fine.

In 1982 the government began prosecuting a handful of nonregistrants. While the numbers were too great to go after everyone, the plan was to carry out a few high profile prosecutions, get lots of publicity and scare folks into registering.

But that plan had unintended consequences. The government prosecuted only twenty people, almost all of whom were public resisters and Conscientious Objectors. They were on the evening news, talking about why they didn't register, why the draft was wrong and how they were following

a "higher" law. Even in conservative venues, like the Iowa cornfields and the military's own "company town" of San Diego, noncompliance with registration *increased* when these personal stories hit the news. Even more young men came to realize that they had a choice — the choice to follow their conscience.

For its part, the government began working on other ways to compel people to register. The solution devised was to link various government "benefits" to registration, beginning with withholding from those who did not register federal student financial aid, including college work-study and federally guaranteed student loans. These laws became known as "Solomon laws," named for the member of Congress who first proposed them as amendments to legislation. Soon, Congress enacted laws with provisions that withheld federal job training, financial aid for medical school, and jobs with federal executive agencies (meaning most federal jobs) from nonregistrants. Federal immigration agencies

joined in and made registration compliance a prerequisite for citizenship.

Almost immediately, states began passing laws requiring registration compliance to receive state financial aid. Some states also require compliance simply to enroll in a state institution of higher education — even on your own dime. A few levy out-of-state tuition on residents who did not register, and some declare nonregistrants ineligible for employment in state government.

Then, thirteen years ago, the most far-reaching proposals began popping up in state legislatures. Selective Service registration is now linked with obtaining a driver's license, and even a state-issued ID. The details of these laws vary from state to state, from requiring SSS registration before one is eligible for a license



THE CENTER ON CONSCIENCE & WAR (CCW) was formed in 1940 by an association of religious bodies to defend and extend the rights of Conscientious Objectors. Contact CCW at 1830 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009; www.centeronconscience.org, or (202) 483-2220.

or ID, to simply providing the opportunity to register at the time one applies for a license. In states requiring registration, a young driver is automatically registered with Selective Service. In states where it is legal to drive at the age of sixteen or younger, that means information from minors who have no legal obligation to be registered at the time is being transmitted to the Selective Service System.

To date, thirty-nine states, the District of Columbia, and four US territories have laws linking Selective Service registration with driver's licenses or IDs. Twenty-nine jurisdictions have linked registration with college financial aid and/or admission, and twenty-one require registration for government employment.

In its annual report, Selective Service states that it would like to see driver's license legislation in all fifty states, but in some states, advocates have been successful at defeating similar proposals — when they see them coming.

Even though many of these laws have been enacted, past court decisions suggest that they may now be challenged successfully.

In 1984, shortly after its passage, the original "Solomon Amendment" was challenged as amounting to a bill of attainder: a law that levies a punishment on someone who has not been convicted of a crime. The court ruled against the challenge, stating that the intent of the law was not to punish anyone, but to get people to register: if someone wanted to avoid the punishment, he could just register. In 1984, only four years after registration was reinstated, everyone who was denied financial aid was under the age of twenty-six and could still register. Today, there are many who didn't register who are twenty-six or older, and can no longer register. Never convicted of any crime, they continue to be punished by being permanently barred from receiving financial aid and participating in other federal or state programs.

Another challenge that may be successful today is a challenge based on sex discrimination. Registration applies only to males, and, likewise, so do the penalties. When SSS registration was challenged as sex discrimination in the early 1980s, the US Supreme Court noted that Congress has the power to raise an army, and because women were, at that time, excluded from combat jobs, the court ruled that Congress was within its authority to require that only males be subject to the draft.

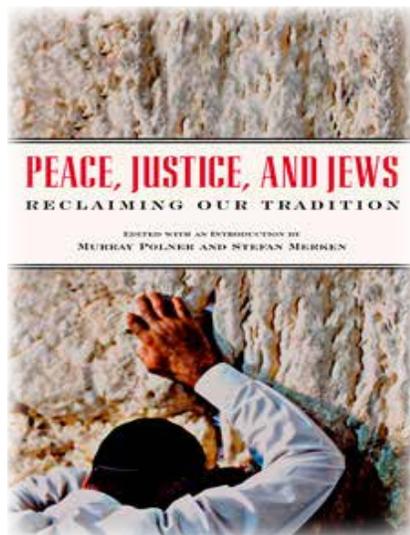
Things have changed since then. While it is clear that women have been involved in combat for a number of years, the Department of Defense officially eliminated the "combat exclusion" for women in early 2013. The justification cited by the Supreme Court for allowing a male-only draft no longer exists.

While these are the primary challenges, there are other issues raised by these laws that are worthy of challenge — for example, the practice in some states of collecting information from underage boys. Also, at a time when no one in Washington really believes the draft will resume in the foreseeable future, some fiscal conservatives have looked at the SSS budget as an easy way to save \$25 million a year.

If a law is so resisted or ignored by the population that a hundred more laws must be passed to coerce people into compliance, it is time we reconsider that initial law.

The strings attached to SSS registration laws are an unacceptable burden on young men struggling to be true to their consciences. In many cases the law imposes a real financial burden, when, for most families, student financial aid or obtaining a driver's license are not benefits or privileges — they are necessities.

It is past time to end draft registration and the penalties imposed on people of conscience. The Selective Service System should be put back into deep standby. ✧



Peace, Justice and Jews: Reclaiming Our Tradition

Edited by Murray Polner and Stefan Merken.

A landmark collection of contemporary progressive Jewish thought written by activists from Israel, the U.S. and the U.K.

Publishers Weekly called it "literate, thought-provoking" and "by no means homogeneous" and which looked at "from all angles, the idea that editors Polner and Merken believe reflect the most basic attitude in our Jewish heritage."

Publishers Weekly concluded: "There is much to learn here for anyone, Jew or Gentile, interested in global issues of peace and justice."

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William Pfaff

The Wars Inside Arab Civilization

WE HAVE TODAY ENTERED A NEW POLITICAL — or politico-religious — period in which the Muslim peoples of the Middle East are seizing control of their own fortunes, a control lost as a result of the First World War and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire — which, with its Arab Caliphate predecessors in Crusader times, traces back to the very origin of Islam in what now is Syria, Iraq and Arabia proper.

Few in the West seem to have grasped the significance of the fact that Muslims themselves have taken over the struggle against Islamic radicalism. The West did not start the war in Syria. Until chemical weapons were used in the war, the West had had no direct implication in it, and feeble indirect ones, other than to assist the victims. It is the Syrians' war, and that of the other Arabs who have chosen to take part.

The rebellion in Syria has divided into sectarian factions: the Alawites led by President Bashar Assad; Sunni Islamists supported by Saudi Arabia and Gulf Arabs; Shiite radicals supported by Iranians and Hezbollah; Kurds, plus several Christian communities attempting to escape the fighting.

Many Western officials and individuals have since 2001 implicitly or explicitly identified the 9/11 attacks as the first blows in a “global clash” of Muslim and Western civilizations, a notion then in fashion among Western policymakers, picked up from the academic world, and accepted by credulous Muslim intellectuals and activists as a plausible

(if wrong-headed) explanation of the West's enmity towards their society.

“Clash of civilizations” still is the explanation for the crisis that is believed in retrograde circles of Western governments, expediently promoted by Israel, whose interests



The grand mosque in Mecca. “The Arabs, Egyptians, and Maghrebis are struggling to redefine themselves and their own destinies, which certainly are not, as Washington thinks, eventually to become acolytes and puppets of Western secular, irreligious or anti-religious, exploitative globalized and militarized capitalism.”

it serves, as well as by the multiplying number of would-be Muslim combat organizations (plus Web sites serving audiences of rootless or uprooted Muslim émigrés and converts in radicalized Western ghettos).

The “war of civilizations” explanation is wrong, and dangerously so. There has been a great change since 2001. The Western assault on Muslim radicals, launched by President George W. Bush with his invasion of Iraq in search of phantom nuclear weapons, and American B-52 mass bombardments followed by unending war in Afghanistan, and those programs of illegal and immoral assassinations which have followed under the direction of Barack Obama, and a Pentagon now reorganized and geared to global action against Islamic religious militants and their friends — all of these

WILLIAM PFAFF is the author of *The Irony of Manifest Destiny*. His writings have appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker* and *the International Herald Tribune*, among many others. Copyright © 2013 by *Tribune Content Agency*. All Rights Reserved.

have thus far met an unbroken series of military defeats or political frustrations or “blowback.” And yet they are being extended, and the American army now is spinning a web of intervention and violence in Africa

These policies have instead set in action a powerful series of new movements inside a fissiparous and demoralized Middle East. These are hostile to and defiant of the West, and committed to causes provoking conflict inside Islamic civilization — or at least inside the Mediterranean Arab part of global Islam, one part of that vastly larger religious civilization which also dominates Indonesia and Malaysia, Pakistan and Central Asia, and a part of China. The crisis is essentially an Arab phenomenon, and indirectly a Western one because the Mediterranean is where European (and latter-day American) imperialism interacted most intimately with Islam.

This war within Muslim civilization is sectarian — Sunni against Shiite — as well as national because the modern Arab world was defined by imperialists in terms of modern monarchies, which subsequently become republics and/or military or secret police dictatorships.

The Arabs, Egyptians, and Maghrebis are struggling to

redefine themselves and their own destinies, which certainly are not, as Washington thinks, eventually to become acolytes and puppets of Western secular, irreligious or antireligious, exploitative globalized and militarized capitalism.

The process has begun in revolt and bloodshed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen — bloodshed foreshadowed by radical upheaval against the US-led West, its modern military presence and actions in the region, provoking the reactionary radicalism of al-Qaeda — and proceeded by Washington’s subsequent clandestine military intervention in Afghanistan, inviting Russian invasion in 1979 and the terrible struggle that followed. From that eventually came the devastating September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington, and all that has followed.

It is essential that the West now cease its interference. It cannot reconcile the Syrians, or the Sunnis and Shiites, nor the conflicts in the Maghreb and the Sahel, mainly produced by climate and history. The West has suffered the delusion that a war on these people would produce modernity and democracy. War is a destroyer, which includes among its victims those who initiate it. ☆

Tom Engelhardt

Bragging Rights

Yes, siree! America is ‘exceptional’!

BUT WHEN, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That’s what makes America different. That’s what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth.

— Barack Obama, address to the nation on Syria, September 10, 2013

TOM ENGELHARDT, *co-founder of the American Empire Project and author of The United States of Fear, as well as a history of the Cold War, The End of Victory Culture, (recently published in a Kindle edition), runs the Nation Institute’s TomDispatch.com. His latest book, co-authored with Nick Turse, is Terminator Planet: The First History of Drone Warfare, 2001-2050. Follow TomDispatch (<http://www.tomdispatch.com>) on Twitter and join us on Facebook or Tumblr. Copyright © 2013 Tom Engelhardt.*

LET’S BE AMERICANS, WHICH MEANS BEING EXCEPTIONAL, which also means being honest in ways inconceivable to the rest of humanity. So here’s the truth of it: the American exceptionalism sweepstakes really do matter. Here. A lot.

Barack Obama is only the latest in a jostling crowd of presidential candidates, presidential wannabes, major politicians and minor figures of every sort (not to speak of a raging horde of neocons and pundits galore) who have felt compelled in recent years to tell us and the world just how exceptional the last superpower really is. They tend to emphasize our ability to use this country’s overwhelming power, especially the military variety, for global good — to save children and other deserving innocents. This particularly American aptitude for doing good forcibly, by killing others, is considered an incontestable fact of earthly life needing no proof. It is well known, especially among our leading politicians, that Washington has the ability to wield its military strength in ways that are unimaginably superior to any other power on the planet.

The well-deserved bragging rights to American exceptionalism are no small matter in this country. It should hardly be surprising, then, how visceral is the distaste when any foreigner — say, Russian President Vladimir Putin — decides to appropriate the term and use it to criticize *us*. How visceral? Well, the sort of visceral that, as Democratic Senator Bob Menendez put it recently, leaves us barely repressing the urge to “vomit.”

Now, it’s not that we can’t take a little self-criticism. If you imagine an over-muscled, over-armed guy walking into a room and promptly telling you and anyone else in earshot how exceptionally good he is when it comes to targeting his weapons, and you notice a certain threatening quality about him, and maybe a hectoring, lecturing tone in his voice, it’s just possible that you might be intimidated or irritated by him. You might think: narcissist, braggart, or blowhard. If you were the president of Russia, you might say, “It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation.”

Yes, if you’re a foreigner, this country is easy enough to misunderstand, make fun of or belittle. Still, that didn’t stop the president from proudly bringing up our exceptionalism in his address on the Syrian crisis. In that speech, he plugged the need for a US military response to the use of chemical weapons by Syria’s military. He recommended launching a “limited strike,” assumedly Tomahawk missiles heading Damascus-wards, to save Syria’s children, and he made sure the world knew that such an attack would be no passing thing. (“Let me make something clear: the United States military doesn’t do pinpricks.”)

Then, in mid-speech, in a fashion that was nothing short of exceptional (if you were considering the internal logic of the address), he suddenly cast that option aside for another approach entirely. But just because of that, don’t let first impressions or foreign criticism blind you to the power of the president’s imagery. In this century, as he suggested then and in an address to the UN two weeks later, American exceptionalism has always had to do with Washington’s ability to use its power for the greater planetary good. Since, in the last decade-plus, power and military power have come to be essentially synonymous in Washington, the pure goodness of firing missiles or dropping bombs has been deified.

On that basis, it’s indisputable that the bragging rights to American exceptionalism are Washington’s. For those who need proof, what follows are just eight ways (among so many more) that you can proudly make the case for our exceptional status, should you happen to stumble across, say, President Putin, still

blathering on about how unexceptional we are.

One: What other country could have invaded Iraq, hardly knowing the difference between a Sunni and a Shiite, and still managed to successfully set off a brutal sectarian civil war and ethnic-cleansing campaigns between the two sects that would subsequently go regional, whose casualty counts have tipped into the hundreds of thousands, and which is now bouncing back on Iraq? What other great power would have launched its invasion with plans to garrison that country for decades and with the larger goal of subduing neighboring Iran (“Everyone wants to go to Baghdad; real men want to go to Tehran”), only to slink away eight years later leaving behind a Shiite government in Baghdad that was a firm ally of Iran? And in what other country, could leaders, viewing these events, and knowing our part in them, have

been so imbued with goodness as to draw further “red lines” and contemplate sending in missiles and bombers again, this time on Syria and possibly Iran? Who in the world would dare claim that this isn’t an unmatched record?

Two: What other country could magnanimously spend \$4-to-6 trillion on two “good wars” in Afghanistan and Iraq against lightly armed minority insurgencies without winning or accomplishing a thing? And that’s not even counting the funds sunk into the “Global War on Terror” and its sideshows in places like Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, or the staggering sums that, since 9/11, have been poured directly into the national security state. How many countries, possessing “the finest fighting force in the history of the world,” could have engaged in endless armed conflicts and interventions from the 1960s on and, except in unresisting Panama and tiny Grenada, never managed to definitively win anything?

Three: And talking about exceptional records, what other military could have brought an estimated 3.1 million pieces of equipment — ranging from tanks and Humvees to porta-potties, coffee makers, and computers — with it into Iraq, and then transported most of them out again (while destroying the rest or turning them over to the Iraqis)? Similarly, in an Afghanistan, where the US military is now drawing down its forces and has already destroyed “more than 170 million pounds worth of vehicles and other military equipment,” what other force would have decided ahead of time to shred, dismantle, or simply discard \$7 billion worth of equipment (about twenty percent of what it had brought into the country)? The general in charge proudly calls this “the largest retrograde mission in history.” To put that in context: What other military would be capable of carrying



American Exceptionalism: ‘What other country could magnanimously spend \$4-to-6 trillion on two “good wars” in Afghanistan and Iraq against lightly armed minority insurgencies without winning or accomplishing a thing?’

a total consumer society right down to PXs, massage parlors, boardwalks, Internet cafes and food courts to war? Let's give credit where it's due: we're not just talking retrograde here. We're talking exceptionally retrograde.

Four: What other military could, in a bare few years in Iraq, have built a staggering five hundred and five bases, ranging from combat outposts to ones the size of small American towns with their own electricity generators, water purifiers, fire departments, fast-food restaurants and even miniature golf courses at a cost of unknown billions of dollars and then, only a few years later, abandoned all of them, dismantling some, turning others over to the Iraqi military or into ghost towns, and leaving yet others to be looted and stripped? And what other military, in the same time period thousands of miles away in Afghanistan, could have built more than four hundred and fifty bases, sometimes even hauling in the building materials, and now be dismantling them in the same fashion? If those aren't exceptional feats, what are?

Five: In a world where it's hard to get anyone to agree about anything, the covert campaign of drone strikes that George W. Bush launched and Barack Obama escalated in Pakistan's tribal areas stands out. Those hundreds of strikes not only caused significant numbers of civilian casualties (including children) while helping to destabilize a sometime ally, but almost miraculously created public unanimity. Opinion polls there indicate that a Ripley's-Believe-It-or-Not-style ninety-seven percent of Pakistanis consider such strikes "a bad thing." Is there another country on the planet capable of mobilizing such loathing? Stand proud, America!

Six: And what other power could have secretly and illegally kidnapped at least a hundred and thirty-six suspected terrorists — some, in fact, innocent of any such acts or associations — from the streets of global cities as well as from the backlands of the planet? What other nation could have mustered a "coalition-of-the-willing" of fifty-four countries to lend a hand in its "rendition" operations? We're talking about more than a quarter of the nations on Planet Earth! And that isn't all. Can you imagine another country capable of setting up a genuinely global network of "black sites" and borrowed prisons (with local torturers on hand), places to stash and abuse those kidnappees (and other prisoners) in locations ranging from Poland to Thailand, Romania to Afghanistan, Egypt and Uzbekistan to US Navy ships on the high seas, not to speak of that jewel in the crown of offshore prisons, Guantanamo? Such illegality on such a global scale simply can't be matched. And don't get me started on torture. (It's fine for us to take pride in our exceptionalist tradition, but you don't want to pour it on, do you?)

Seven: Or how about the way the State Department, to the tune of \$750 million, constructed in Baghdad the largest, most expensive embassy compound on the planet — a one-hundred-and-four acre, Vatican-sized citadel with twenty-seven blast-resistant buildings, an indoor pool, basketball courts, and a fire

station, which was to operate as a command-and-control center for our ongoing garrisoning of the country and the region? Now, the garrisons are gone, and the embassy, with its staff cut, is a global white elephant. But what an exceptional elephant! Think of it as a modern American pyramid, a tomb in which lie buried the dreams of establishing a *Pax Americana* in the Greater Middle East. Honestly, what other country could hope to match that sort of memorial thousands of miles from home?

Eight: Or what about this: Between 2002 and 2011, the U.S. poured at least \$51 billion into building up a vast Afghan military. Another \$11 billion was dedicated to the task in 2012, with almost \$6 billion more planned for 2013. Washington has also sent in a legion of trainers tasked with turning that force into an American-style fighting outfit. At the time Washington began building it up, the Afghan army was reportedly a heavily illiterate, drug-taking, corrupt and ineffective force that lost one-third to one-half of its personnel to casualties, non-reenlistment and desertion in any year. In 2012, the latest date for which we have figures, Afghan security forces were still a heavily illiterate, drug-taking, corrupt and inefficient outfit that was losing about one-third of its personnel annually (a figure that may even be on the rise). The US and its NATO allies are committed to spending \$4.1 billion annually on the same project after the withdrawal of their combat forces in 2014. Tell me that isn't exceptional.

No one, of course, loves a braggart. So, as easy as it might be to multiply these eight examples by others, the winner of the American exceptionalism sweepstakes is already obvious. In other words, this is a moment for exceptional modesty, which means that only one caveat need be added to the above record.

I'm talking about actual property rights to "American exceptionalism." It's a phrase often credited to a friendly nineteenth-century foreigner, the French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville. As it happens, however, the man who seems to have first used the full phrase was Joseph Stalin. In 1929, when the US was showing few signs of proletarian uprising or fulfilling Karl Marx's predictions, and American Communists were claiming that the country had unique characteristics that left it unready for revolution, Stalin began denouncing "the heresy of American exceptionalism." Outside the US Communist Party, the phrase only gained popular traction here in the Reagan years. Now it has become as American as sea-salt potato chips. If, for instance, the phrase had never before been used in a presidential debate, in 2012 the candidates couldn't stop wielding it.

Still, history does give Vladimir Putin a claim to use of the phrase, however stomach-turning that may be for various members of Congress. But maybe, in its own way, its origins only attest to... well, American exceptionalism. Somehow, through pureness of motive and the shining radiance of the way we exercise power, Washington's politicians have taken words wielded negatively by one of the great monsters of history and made them the signature phrase of American greatness. How exceptional! ✨

Murray Polner

Gulag Women

Communism's female victims



AT FIRST GLANCE PAUL R. GREGORY'S *WOMEN OF the Gulag* (Hoover Institution Press) is old hat, repeating for the umpteenth time tales of Stalinist Russia's brutality directed at its own citizens. Familiar to most is the deliberate starvation of a million or more Ukrainians in the early Thirties and the fratricidal murders of the Old Bolsheviks and the Red Army's generals, all well documented by historians, participants and those who suffered. Thus far, Stalin hasn't received any revisionist makeover in the English language, at least not yet.

Why, then, another book on Stalinist Russia? After all, despite the suicide of his second wife and death of two sons, Stalin left no known diaries or letters. *Women of the Gulag*,

based on released Soviet documents and a trove of other material, mainly in the Russian language, is unique because it deals with how the dictator's dark and irrational behavior traumatized five Soviet women and their families, all of whom were victims.

What also makes this book unlike others is its revelation that, other than the elites Stalin had tried and executed by kangaroo courts, his reign of terror primarily involved regular, commonplace citizens, victims of what Gregory, who wrote the admirable *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin*, describes as "mass insanity and hysteria." In a flat though not uninteresting writing style, Gregory is less concerned with historical and political developments than the tragedies experienced by women.

Those arrested were shipped off to gulags, punished and

MURRAY POLNER is co-editor of *SHALOM*.

sometimes executed because of what their husbands, lovers and fathers were accused of doing. “Once in the Gulag, they were subjected to particular kinds of sexual enslavement and violence that male prisoners did not have to endure.”

In August 1937, the Soviet Communist Party’s Politburo ordered: “Wives of traitors are to be imprisoned... no less than five to eight years. Children from ages three to fifteen are to be placed in orphanages of the ministry of health in other locations.” Adds Gregory: if family members did not denounce their allegedly seditious husbands, “they were to be arrested themselves and their children taken away.”

It wasn’t Stalin alone. After all, he needed tens of thousands of secret police, camp guards, mendacious judges and prosecutors, and a cowed populace. In all Russian history, but for very brief periods after Tsar Nicholas II’s abdication in 1917 and following the collapse of communism, democratic rule has been an unknown factor. During Stalin’s reign, even given all the horrors he inflicted, there were no uprisings, violent or nonviolent, no secret underground press denouncing the savagery and incarceration of millions. In one scene in *Women in the Gulag*, an NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) officer fears that conversation with his wife in their apartment may be bugged. So much for the surveillance state.

Stalin’s closest flatterers and bootlickers were his inner circle: Lazar Kaganovich, the Jewish sycophant who never objected to Stalin’s loathing and persecution of Jews; Vyacheslav Molotov (who once declared after the signing of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact that fascism was a matter of taste), kept his mouth shut when his Jewish wife annoyed “the Master” (the hush-hush name given him by insiders), and was then dispatched to some distant camp; Anastas Mikoyan, the Armenian toady who dressed like the Master and at an inner-circle gathering so praised Stalin that “the members of the audience sprang to their feet in an ecstasy of applause and ovation, as if overcome by insanity.” Stalin trusted Kliment (“Klim”) Voroshilov, his dim-witted friend, but another friend from civil war days, Sergio Ordzhonikidzi, killed himself, possibly because he was troubled by the prevailing madness, and his suicide was hidden from the Soviet public.

Gregory centers the book on five women: Agnessa, Evgenia, Maria, Adile and Fekla. Agnessa’s Jewish husband Sergei Mironov was an NKVD officer who meted out ultimate punishments to others but panicked when his superiors tired of him and his end drew near.

Evgenia, a Jewish woman, was married to Nikolai Ezhov, who replaced Genrikh Yagoda as head of the NKVD and served the Master very well. (Ezhov was a real piece of work: brutal, bisexual, often drunk, and a womanizer. His shirt



‘The Master’ and some henchmen: (Left to right) Vyacheslav Molotov, Joseph Stalin, Kliment Voroshilov; Nikolai Ezhov with Stalin.

was often covered with the blood of prisoners, high and low. One very cautious Communist official warned his colleagues: “If you give him an assignment, there is no need to check, but you must watch him.” He killed a woman, Gregory tells us, “who had treated him as a son in Moscow.”)

Stalin would eventually need a scapegoat and he tired of Ezhov, who grew terrified that his life was

approaching a violent end. He sullenly withdrew into an alcoholic fog, had sex with anyone and everyone, and became severely depressed. Before his execution in February 1940, Ezhov told a military court, “I purged 14,000 Chekists. But my huge mistake is that I purged so few. My life cannot be spared. I plea for one thing: shoot me quietly without torture.” And incredibly he added, “Tell Stalin that I will die with his name on my lips.”

Stalin then named fellow Georgian Lavrenti Beria to succeed Ezhov, a move which petrified loyal party members even more. Suspicion then turned to Evgenia, his widow, who had an “open marriage,” and one of her partners was the great Jewish writer Isaac Babel. It was he who offended the ruling caste by saying that arrests and executions were as normal as weather reports. For that and other sins Babel was doomed. Evgenia, as Ezhov’s widow, fell under suspicion. Desperate, she pleaded for her life in a letter to the Master, which naturally went unanswered.

Maria’s husband, a railway engineer named Alexander Ignatkin, was arrested by the Chita NKVD, which, says Gregory, “had to find enemies among the rail engineers and workers to show its value to Moscow.” Ignatkin was executed, and Maria served eight years’ imprisonment while separated from her children. Stalin died in 1953 and four years later Maria was notified that her husband had been tortured and executed. In October 1957 she and her husband were officially rehabilitated.

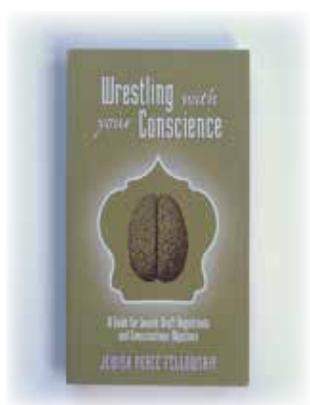
Fekla was from Abkhazia. She also suffered along with her family for fictional crimes against the government. She and her “dekulakized” family were stripped of everything and shipped to a prison camp. In 1956, her father, who died in the Gulag, was “rehabilitated posthumously.” To her credit, she neither forgot nor forgave. After Fekla and her mother were freed in 1957, they returned to a home and world they barely knew. She became a founding member of the Kamensk Memorial Society and several other memorial groups dedicated to remembering Stalin’s victims.

Finally, Adile, also from Abkhazia, married into a prominent Communist family, some of whom would later be arrested and murdered. Her brother-in-law, Nestor Lakoba, once friendly with Stalin, had the misfortune of crossing Beria, who poisoned him while Sariya, his wife, was jailed. At nineteen, Adile was deported to Kazakhstan just for being

part of the family.

We have to wonder why so many millions of Russians allowed themselves to be enslaved, tortured and murdered, and why women and children were brutalized. Why did so many passively cooperate with their killers? Obviously, it wasn't easy to rebel. But not until Khrushchev's secret revelations in 1956 about Stalin did few in the gulags or at home dare protest. Gregory cites one instance when a large number of women gathered to object to the detention of family members in an NKVD prison, an event reminiscent of the Ger-

man Rosenstrasse protest, when non-Jewish wives of Jewish husbands nonviolently and successfully demanded release of their husbands from a Gestapo prison in Berlin during World War II and saved them from a trip to a death camp. In Stalin's Russia, even so minor a "victory" was not permitted and the protesting women were dispersed. Adile and Sariya were among the demonstrators but paid the price. Sariya was arrested and, eventually, Adile as well. Paul Gregory's pertinent account reminds us that victims should neither be forgotten nor their executioners forgiven. ✧



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