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## Way Down South



*Cover of the June 24, 1969 issue*

*From Where I Sit***Some of My Favorite Quotes***Stefan Merken*

**L**ike many people, I collect things. One of the most interesting collections I have are quotes that seem to crystallize the essence of a complex idea. And like many, I can return to a good quote over and over. Here are a few quotes from many I have collected in recent days. Enjoy.

“In 2018, with almost instant communication world wide, there is no reason to have wars, to use bombs to settle differences or conflicts or to settle arguments. We just can’t afford that anymore.” —Stefan Merken

“The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.” —Omar Bradley

“Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I’m not sure about the universe.” —Albert Einstein

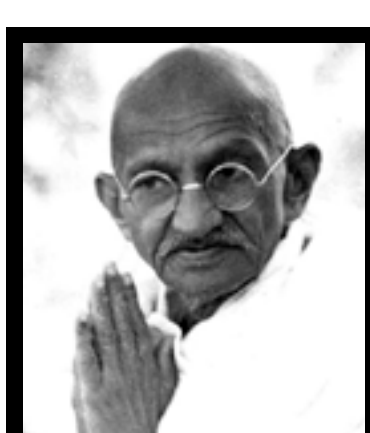
“We learned that it is possible to create partnerships despite differences and disagreements. We learned that it’s possible to include and respect other people for who they are, and that also on the “other” side are people that desire to live in quiet and in peace.” —Rabbi Shaul Judelman, co-director of Friends of Roots network

“Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one’s weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

“The path to Auschwitz was paved with indifference.”

—Ian Kershaw



*Mahatma Gandhi*

STEFAN MERKEN is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

*The Heart of the Problem*

PETER BEINART  
The Crisis of Zionism  
(New York: Henry Holt, 2012)

“At the core of the tragedy lies the refusal to accept that in both America and Israel, we live in an age not of Jewish weakness, but of Jewish power, and that without moral vigilance, Jews will abuse power just as hideously as anyone else.”

**SHALOM**

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## Forever Wars, Forever Changes

### The Iraq War's Age of Madness

Beyond wrecking the Middle East, the period was a blow to our national psyche—from which we have yet to recover.

Matt Purple

I hate to blow my cover, but I fear the Iraq war may have been my fault.

I was in high school in early 2002 when military operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan began winding down (or so we thought at the time). Assigned to write a current events report for my civics class, I decided to research five seemingly terrorism-plagued nations and consider which one was ripest for American intervention. The conclusion I came to, inflamed little post-9/11 thing that I was, was that it had to be Iraq, fiefdom of America's iconic foe Saddam Hussein, who, after all, probably had weapons of mass destruction and would crumple easily before our vastly superior military and his own people's thirst for liberty. My teacher agreed and gave me an A+. He never told me that he passed off my report to the Bush administration, but you know how these closet Straussians are about their noble lies.

I was 14 when I handed in that assignment; I am now 30 and American troops are still in Iraq, despite the Bush administration's promise of a short war. And while, of course, my homework assignment did not have all the geopolitical significance of the Zimmerman Telegram, I

still find it revealing that the rationales dashed off by a freshman as the clock ticked down to third period were nearly identical to the ones posited by the most powerful men on earth in support of the heaviest mobilization of military power in a decade. Plenty of wars haven't been premised on such woolly-headed swagger, but Iraq was. Remember the unicorns that passed as post-war planning? Donald Rumsfeld's lighter, nimbler military would have the place licked in a matter of months. The country's vast oil wealth would cover the expenses. The Sunnis and Shias would be too busy frolicking through their newfound emerald libertyscape to start a sectarian war. Some fellow named Ahmed Chalabi who had left Iraq 45 years ago would be lowered via crane into Baghdad and established as the country's new president. The state would be cleansed of Baathists without serious consequence. All of Iraq would be fortified into a liberal outpost from which our values could be spread to its neighbors.

The American Revolution and Civil War began out of necessity and developed more idealistic *casus belli* as

*The Iraq War is the most ideologically driven that the U.S.A. has ever fought.*



DoD photo by Cherie A. Thurlby / Released

they proceeded; Iraq from its start was the most ideological war we've ever fought. This was to be a struggle against not just the Saddam regime but the metaphysical order itself, a boot that would see the door to hell at last kicked down. "Our responsibility to history is already clear," declared George W. Bush after 9/11, "to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil." He was echoed by neoconservatives Richard Perle and David Frum who dutifully blueprinted the crusade ahead in their book *An End to Evil* (New York: Ballantine, 2004). ("An end to evil!" my old professor Dr. Claes Ryn once exclaimed, his eyes twinkling. "Have you ever heard anything so absurd?") A rash of looting after the invasion was dismissed as a mere spasm before the material caught up with the form: "freedom's messy," as Rumsfeld so blithely put it. The ethos of the moment was best described by Hegel (and later parroted portentously by Francis Fukuyama): "We stand at the gates of an important epoch, a time of ferment, when spirit moves forward in a leap, transcends its previous shape and takes on a new one."

It was an age when the universal was to overcome the particular, when an American president could try to ramrod Turkey into the European Union against that institution's wishes because, after all, all nations were compatible with liberal democracy, were they not? We were like an addict who had finally kicked his habit and was now so euphoric over being clean that he thought nothing was beyond his capacity. This idealism was genuinely felt and believed, yet it came attached to a string: while we were busy painting the world in black and white, our leaders had also concluded that in order for the white to prevail a little of the black needed to be allowed to encroach. Dick Cheney called this "the dark side." It meant a prison in Cuban no-man's-land not subjected to legal oversight. It also meant disappearing prisoners of war and subjecting

them to interrogation techniques that might not comport with a strict reading of the Eighth Amendment.

It was the cleavage between our ideals and this dark side that drove the last nail into the Iraq project's coffin. When photos emerged from the American-refashioned Abu Ghraib prison of our soldiers mugging next to pyramids of naked detainees and dragging Iraqis around

on leashes, the response from the Muslim world, already on edge over the realization of Shiite political power in Baghdad, was predictably furious and bloody. The face of the occupation was suddenly Lynndie England, the soldier most visibly involved in the abuse. She was dishonorably discharged and imprisoned herself, but in way she became a synecdoche for the entire war, an enlistee who had gone abroad as part of a reformist army only to find that it was she who had been changed. A slow trickle of news culminating in a 2014 Senate investigation revealed that Abu Ghraib wasn't an anomaly, that detainees in American custody had been extensively waterboarded, subjected to forced rectal feeding, made to stand for hours on broken legs, chained up, hooded and dragged down

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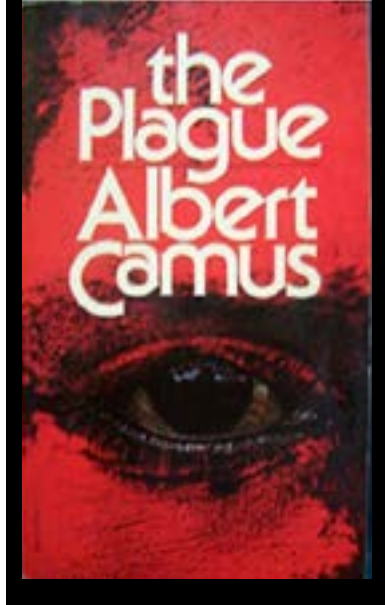
*The cleavage between our ideals and the dark side drove the last nail into the Iraq project's coffin.*

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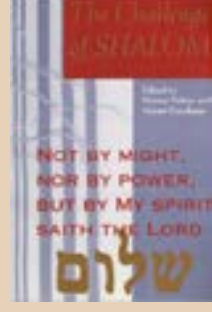
corridors, and shipped off to prisons in other countries to be tortured. Determined to export the Enlightenment, we'd ended up rationalizing the same medieval techniques used by the despotisms we claimed to despise.

There's a scene in Camus' novel *The Plague* where the journalist Rambert is weighing whether to flee the pestilence-ravaged town of Oran, while his friend Rieux insists on staying behind. Rieux's cold self-abnegation aggravates Rambert, who exclaims, "You're using the language of reason, not the heart." Rieux then glances up at a statue of the French Republic, a symbol of both the reason and the warmth of home between which Rambert must decide. An American gazing upon a statue of George Washington wouldn't experience any such dilemma over Iraq. The philosophies and traditions that undergirded our country's founding are incompatible with forever war, as our founders repeatedly warned; and our national heart returned home long ago, exasperated with the failures of democratic evangelism and in need of a little housekeeping of its own. It isn't reason that keeps us in Iraq (and Syria and Afghanistan and Somalia and Libya and...); it's the discredited and jejune ideology of humanitarian empire that first took root 15 years ago and that we still cling to with cracked knuckles.

Such magical thinking wrecked the Middle East, precipitated a refugee crisis, helped spike the national debt to \$21 trillion and counting—yet skip over to *Commentary* or the *Weekly Standard* or any other hawkish publication of record and you're unlikely to find a single retrospective on Iraq's big 15th. Instead they rail against Trump for using crude pejoratives akin to the ones they once hurled against war dissenters, and puzzle over the anger of the deplorables whom they sent to Mesopotamia by the thousands. And then it's on to the next battle, as the Trump administration reportedly considers for a top position a mustachioed hothead who wants military strikes against both North Korea and Iran. Iraq changed us forever: along with the recession it was one of two blows to our national psyche that precipitated our fraught present times. It changed us forever and yet, at least from my view 15 years later, not of the chalkboard now but the Washington skyline, it changed us so very little. ☆



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*Home for Two***Working the Land and Finding a Home**

How a connection to the physical land of Israel led to a life in the Holy Land

*Shaul Judelman*

*Together on a kibbutz, Jews from Ukraine, Uruguay, Mexico, Serbia, Ethiopia, France, and more all felt they were “home.”*

I remember as a child feeling jealous as other kids inherited their uncles’ baseball card collections, while my dad tried to figure out how American football worked. Having moved to Seattle from South Africa as a child, the idea of “home” was always an enigma. My early years carried a certain nostalgia for the places we had left, a curiosity for the stories and histories of where we had been—South Africa, Eastern Europe. And as a Jew, Israel, of course, was always on the list.

Being an immigrant also bred an appreciation and admiration for what America sets out to be—a home for the tired, the poor. But that model society wasn’t built on a clean slate.

While in college in Southern California, I volunteered with a group working on the Navajo (Diné) Reservation in northeast Arizona supporting families trying to maintain

their tradition and live on the land—as opposed to selling it off to vying coal companies. One day, when some young people on the rez were giving me directions, I noticed how they used features of the landscape as reference points: a certain tree, a dried well, an outcropping of rocks. My equivalent would be, go north on 10th Avenue till you reach Broadway, and then take a left on Harvard. I was blown away by their connection with place, their land. As a Jew, I wondered about Israel, our land. What happens to the “People of the Book” when we return to our land? What would a land-based Judaism look like?

My semester abroad was at hand, and instead of flying to Zimbabwe or Nepal, I decided that before I go out



*Mario Levi, an Israeli pioneer, and an organic farmer.*

and meet another culture, I’d better check in at “home.”

I arrived at Sde Eliyahu, a religious kibbutz famous for its organic farming, which was spearheaded by a legendary man with a gigantic smile named Mario Levi. After emigrating from Italy in the 1930s, Mario became a founder of the organic farming movement in Israel. Getting to work in his vegetable field, having my hands held in his grip, was a blessing. He planted me in this land.

I joined the kibbutz ulpan (Hebrew language program) and met Jews of all ages and sizes from Ukraine, Uruguay, Mexico, Serbia, Ethiopia, France, and beyond—all of us somehow “home.” On one hot day in the fields, Marla, a volunteer from Uruguay, handed me a pomegranate on her way to the orchards. Standing beneath the shadowed hills of Gilboa, I felt a need to give thanks. I wasn’t “religious,” but I knew the traditional blessing: *Baruch Ata... borei pri ha’etz*. Tears started rolling down my cheeks. How could I possibly put the depth of gratitude for it all into those words, standing again in our people’s land, with the language and tradition of my people on my lips?

Building my life in Israel has been powered by the sense of national home and our people’s story. On the one hand, it’s so simple. But in reality, this coming home places before us the biggest questions we face as a people. Within months of my arrival, the second intifada broke out, and the sense

of home was reinforced by the battle for home.

As time went on, another side was revealed. Beneath the violence lay a real complexity: Our story

of home is smack in the middle of another story of home. And today, instead of trying to fight the never-ending battle of denying someone else’s home, I’m the co-director of Roots, an Israeli-Palestinian initiative that believes this land is home to both peoples. Our work focuses on local communities between Jerusalem and Hebron—building trust, creating partnerships, and working for our future. Can we build a house here? Draw a property line in the middle? Could we live and serve a deep sense of our people’s roots here alongside each other? I’ve come to believe that home is where the work before you is truly your work. ✪

*Coming home places before us the biggest questions we face as a people.*

**SHAUL JUDELMAN** lives with his wife Shayna and three children. When not involved in the stress of Israeli-Palestinian community work, he enjoys being outside and playing music.

Donations to Roots: <https://www.friendsofroots.net/donate/>.

This article first appeared in Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle’s *Jewish In Seattle* magazine.

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## Civil Rights

## Way Down South

Murray Polner

I first went South with the U.S. Army in the early 1950s before heading overseas. Each time I carried with me a fascinating book, *Mind of the South*, published in 1941 by southern-born and bred W. J. Cash.

When I returned as a journalist, and then as a tourist, I developed an affection for the distinctiveness of the South's rich scent of its warm, wet late winter earth, its unhurried pace and the welcoming cadence of Southern speech.

However, rather than my admittedly simplistic views, Cash and those who followed had long since written of a more complex and realistic southern society. Some words he wrote still stick with me.

"Proud, brave and honorable by its lights, courteous, personally generous, loyal, swift to act, often too swift, but signally effective, sometimes terrible in its action—such was the South at its best. And such as its best remains today, despite the great falling away in some of its virtues. Violence, intolerance, aversion and suspicion toward new ideas, an incapacity for analysis, an inclination to act from feeling rather than from thought, an exaggerated individualism and too narrow a concept of social responsibility, attachment to fictions and false name of those values, sentimentality and a lack of realism—these have been its characteristic vices in the past. And, despite changes for the better, they remain characteristic vices today."

The first thing my wife and I realized was that it was hard not knowing how to express our liberal racial views in a southern community. When my wife applied for her Georgia driver's license, white state troopers moved her to the front of the line, explaining to her, but not to the black people also waiting on long lines, that "a lovely lady like you shouldn't have to wait on so long a line." I listened and I said nothing.

But we became a bit bolder after that, joining the library of the all-black Paine College and sitting in the rear of buses as long as we were permitted. I attended gatherings of several groups, mainly black but with several whites too, fighting for the right to vote. In the early fifties, in Augusta, Georgia, a middle school faculty voted overwhelmingly to quit their public school and join a private and racially segregated academy, a move opposed only by my Augusta teacher-wife and one of her northern-born colleagues. Even so, as late as in Mississippi in the seventies, two Jewish businessmen who described themselves as moderate, said that Theodore Bilbo, their blatantly racist and anti-Semitic senator, wasn't too bad once you got to know him.

Still, what I remember are the few white southern editors I reached out to. Stanley Dearman, edited and owned the *Neshoba Democrat*, a Philadelphia, Mississippi, weekly, the same town where the killers lived. When I visited him he only wanted to speak of how much he wanted the murderers of Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman caught and prosecuted. He even visited New York City to interview Carolyn Goodman, Andrew's mother. Jerry Mitchell, the best of white southern newspapermen, said Dearman "was blessed with an internal moral compass that drove his courageous work as a journalist."

In Greenville, Hodding Carter's *Delta Democrat-Times*'s advertisers, many of whom were local Jewish merchants, refused to cancel their ads when the paper was condemned by segregationists and KKK-types for its liberal position on race. But the civil rights insurrection of the sixties had changed the South. Racism, he told a group of historians and journalists at Wake Forest University (Cash's alma mater) in 1991, "You like me grew up suffused, immersed with the results of the Old South, if you were black, or the mystique and myth of the Old South if you were white. Today's southern students, by contrast, "Know more about MTV than they know about the Lost Cause or the Old South....They don't know [about the old South], they don't care, they're not interested, they don't have a clue. They are as one with their nation." Southerners are,

wrote Wake Forest historian Paul D. Escott in *W.J. Cash and the Minds of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992) "no longer of one mind."

And then there was P. D. East, who ran *Petal Paper* in Petal, Mississippi, from 1953-1971, a virtual lone wolf who I talked to on the phone and who dared to speak out against the state's ruling bigots and death threats. He'd lost his local subscribers though a few remaining ones, like me, continued subscribing to the paper.

I'm not sure if the heroic story of a handful of southern liberal whites who refused to remain silent has ever really been told. Perhaps the closest may be Diane McWhorter's superb story of her native Birmingham in *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001). But then there was *Kudzu*.

There were of course, many other exceptional whites, like the white northern woman and mother Viola Liuzzo, who volunteered as a driver and but for Gary May's perceptive book, *The Informant: The FBI, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Murder of Viola Liuzzo* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), and a lone memorial erected in her memory near Selma by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and might now be forgotten. Like so many others she was slain while hate-filled media, common people and politicians excoriated her and other victims.

In the sixties, in Mississippi, that storied bastion of white supremacy, a group of white kids "descended from rednecks, slave owners and bible thumpers," wrote David Doggett, former editor of *Kudzu*—named after an annoying and prolific southern vine—published an underground paper in Jackson, the state capital, for four years. *Kudzu* also drew some whites to its side. After unarmed Kent State University students were killed and wounded by draft dodging Ohio National Guardsmen in 1970 and after Mississippi cops killed two defenseless black Jackson State University students, Doggett proudly said that

*It was hard not knowing how to express our liberal racial views in a southern community.*

*Northern and western towns and cities also carried on unremitting resistance against black Americans by permitting residential and school discrimination.*

*Continued next page*



Theodore Bilbo, elected as a Democrat to the United States Senate in 1934, 1940 and again in 1946



Viola Fauver Gregg Liuzzo, civil rights activist from Michigan murdered by the KKK.

Continued from page 6

*Kudzu* was “the only paper in Jackson that presented the students’ accounts of the killings.” Soon after, 200 white students joined *Kudzu*’s staff in a protest march.

*New York Times* reporter Campbell Robertson recently wrote “Church, Race and My Childhood,” an article about black congregants quitting white majority churches. Robertson, born and raised a Baptist in small-town Alabama, saw the still-small number of departures as large enough to suggest “the unraveling of decades of efforts at racial reconciliation.” African Americans told her that Trayvon Martin’s death in 2012 was a sign that not too many whites cared about black kids getting killed.

Edith Wharton’s celebrated lecture “America at War” highlighted the truth that America’s development was “saturated in the blood of others,” including Native Americans and of course African slaves. Yet the curse of slavery’s legacy has never really faded, or so it seems to me.

One of the few truthful academics during Mississippi’s worst modern eras was Ole Miss Historian James Silver. He damned the state as a “closed society—totalitarian, monolithic and corrupt” and eventually left to teach at Notre Dame. It’s easy to forget that Mississippi was then under the control of the most lawless and racist elements. A police state, one Mississippian told me. Phones were tapped, mail opened. Faculty fired. Dissenting clergy warned. The last time I toured a southern town in the late eighties, Confederate

flags could be seen hanging from modest homes. Years later, the confederate monuments issue made the racial question, however subtle, come alive and reveal yet again the rage and bitterness that triggered the issue.

“Slavery built the culture that built slavery and defined how people behaved,” then and now, explained Mark M. Smith, a historian at the University of South Carolina in *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Cities like Charleston in South Carolina, a city of 70,000 in 1860, on the eve of secession and civil war, had 2,800 whites owning 37,000 slaves, its slave trade by far the largest in the country. When I once asked a tour guide in Charleston in the late nineteen eighties why she had excluded Black Charleston, she apologized, changed gears, and began a factual history of slavery’s brutalities while she led us on an exploration of black neighborhoods.

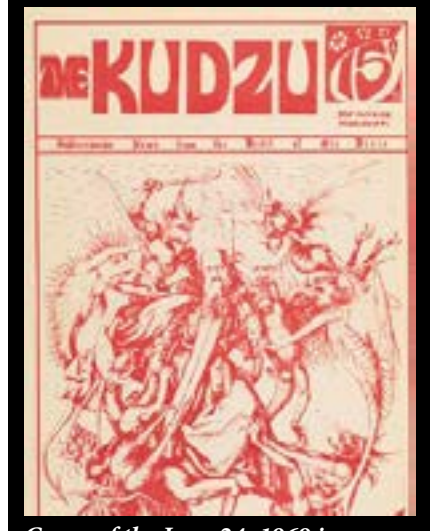
Until the Civil Rights era, the Old South was rightly associated with the bigoted Theodore Bilbo, Jesse Helms, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, George Wallace, Eugene Talmadge, and Lester Maddox, and others, a distant land of Black Codes and where thousands of African Americans were lynched—“public murders that were tolerated by state and federal officials,” and their killers, as Bryan Stevenson, a Montgomery, Alabama, lawyer whose group Equal Justice Initiative defends the jailed and condemned poor, has painfully pointed out, were never punished.

Antagonism toward African Americans was encouraged by northern politicians and voters. The once-liberal and ex-NYC Mayor turned racist Ed Koch during his campaigns for office regularly denounced reforms meant to relieve the poor as catering to “welfare queens” and “poverty pimps.” Ronald Reagan famously opened his campaign for the presidency at the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and Barry Goldwater hid behind his States Rights beliefs while voting against civil rights bills.

Northern and western towns and cities also carried on unremitting resistance against black Americans by permitting residential and school discrimination. *Cycles of Segregation: Social Process and Residential Stratification* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2017), a new book by Maria Krysan and Kyle Crowder, emphasizes that while the Fair Housing Act of 1968 banned residential bias due to race, a half century later nothing much has changed. A cynical southerner told me that as I write my critical account of southern racism to add the story of Boston’s bitter protests against integrating their public schools. I know too that Great Neck, my town, once passionately refused to allow a small number of poor black kindergartners from Jamaica, Queens, to enroll in its affluent schools.

Far too many Americans, in the Deep South but equally in the North too, still treat African American citizens as lesser beings, insuring they live apart, a modern version of “Separate but equal.”

While much has changed since W. J. Cash’s 1941 *Mind of the South*, and southerners are no longer monolithic, there are many miles to go, north and west as well as south. ☆



Cover of the June 24, 1969 issue



Bryan Stevenson, founder of Equal Justice Initiative

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