

A Child's Garden of Neoconservatism

by Paul Gottfried

The Neoconservative Vision
From the Cold War to
the Culture Wars

by Mark Gerson

Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books;
368 pp., \$27.95



Now a law student at Yale University, Mark Gerson has devoted several years of his young life to a lucrative task: gilding the lily for neoconservative patrons. As a contributor to *Commentary*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New Republic*, he has spoken out on behalf of the harmless persuasion and is now about to bring out an anthology in conjunction with the present book, *The Essential Neoconservative Reader*. But his comments on the “neoconservative vision” never move beyond tasteless panegyric, and for anyone hoping to find here even a modicum of critical insight, Gerson’s book can only bring frustration.

Though organized chronologically, it fails to give the slightest hint of motion, beginning and ending at the same point, the glorification of those Zionist Cold War liberals who came to be known as “neoconservatives.” Perhaps Gerson is imitating the example of Procopius of Caesarea, who left behind a tell-all history about his imperial patron after having written an official chronicle of the wars of Justinian; for now, however, we must assume that what we see is what Gerson wishes (or is allowed) to reveal.

What value his book has is entirely accidental. After all, it does carry its *nihil obstat* in the form of blurbs from Christopher DeMuth, Fred Barnes, Robert Bork, and David Frum, all true believers who praise this book as “the most complete history” and “compelling account” of their movement. In several instances, however, the received neoconservative account is used to obfuscate a complex or embarrassing truth. At least ten pages are devoted to stressing the neoconservative belief in the “free mar-

ket.” Gerson credits his group with the insight that “the plausible alternative to the free market” is “a large and powerful government in some kind of socialist system.” He also expresses as a foundational neoconservative belief that “affirmative action is pernicious” because of its explicit and implicit support of racial discrimination and the “undemocratic way in which it was established.”

Unfortunately, both positions are gross overstatements. The neoconservative disapproval of affirmative action was instantly suspended when Bill Kristol and others at the *Weekly Standard* came out in support of presidential hopeful Colin Powell. This was done because of Powell’s supposed usefulness as a black role model, despite his open endorsement of government-enforced affirmative action. Obviously the neoconservatives’ quest for public favors in Washington, which would benefit from a Powell presidency, took precedence here over what Gerson presents as unshakable principle. As for the neoconservative devotion to the free market, it is clear that Gerson is following his mentors in confusing capitalism with the cultivation of corporate executives. Neoconservatives have done the second brilliantly, while expressing support for a “democratic welfare state.” It is surprising (or is it?) that Gerson, who quotes from Michael Novak’s *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, does not notice the obvious: namely, that Novak and other neoconservatives fail to recognize the similarities between “democratic capitalism” and social democracy. What they want is a combination of big business and big government from which they can jointly benefit. And so far they have milked both sides, while managing to enjoy journalistic respectability.

Gerson serves up platitudes about the “Catholic-Jewish” alliance in his camp being based on “genuine respect for the other religion.” Moreover, “Jewish neoconservatives genuinely like Christianity and the Christian neoconservatives genuinely like Judaism,” even if “theological differences do remain.” The only thing “genuine” about this observation is its utter silliness. The “Jewish-Catholic alliance” to which Gerson refers has little to do with theological agreement or dis-

agreement. It is a feudal arrangement whereby influential and well-heeled Jewish Zionist journalists and foundation mavens deputize, among others, pliant goyim to front for them. There is some theological dialogue that goes on intermittently in the pages of that quirky little newsletter *First Things*, where Richard Neuhaus incessantly repudiates anti-Semitism while David Novak stresses the nonnegotiable differences between us and them. But such exchanges are not the most significant feature of the “Jewish-Catholic alliance” to which Gerson alludes. Nor is the defense of “Judeo-Christian values,” an activity that almost all Jewish organizations lament as a Christian conspiracy to control the American state. It is also clear that Gerson has not read back issues of *Commentary*, which feature multiple tirades against the irrational and anti-Semitic sources of Christianity. I cite as cases in point the voluminous attacks on the “Crucifixion myth” and the Pauline Epistles, published in *Commentary* in the early 1980’s. But the crucial point here is that Gerson is misdescribing a power relationship. Jews and Catholics who are financially and professionally dependent on neoconservative leadership do and say what they are told. They praise movement supporters and those who take ultranationalist positions on Israeli politics as pro-democratic and philo-Semitic; they also anathematize those on the other side as racist, anti-Semitic, or whatever other smear will play well with their journalistic colleagues.

Finally, it might be useful to note Gerson’s account of the thunderous rupture between Richard Neuhaus and The Rockford Institute, which began the latest phase of the American conservative wars. Since Gerson’s received version is put up against my own, it behooves me to defend my account, which is attributed to a “paleoconservative promoter.” Unlike Gerson’s version, which ascribes the break to Neuhaus’s anguished response to anti-Semitism, my own explanation in *The Conservative Movement* (second edition) stresses the irrepressible conflict between opposed worldviews. Though The Rockford Institute has shown absolutely no sign of anti-Semitism, it does present a deeply tradi-

tionalist understanding of the human condition and of political life. It has frontally assaulted the root assumptions of the left, particularly those regarding the universalization of political models, the doctrine of human rights, and the use of public administration to achieve social change. It has also challenged the neoconservative position—embraced by Neuhaus—that there have been two civil rights movements, a moderate Christian one followed by a derailed and radicalized one. In fact, Neuhaus's public fulminations against the Institute were aimed at *Chronicles'* position on immigration, a position that has been adopted by *National Review* and many other centrist conservative groups that remain in communion with the neoconservative empire. Gerson is wrong on the facts of the case, but ultimately he may not care.

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Haters and Self-Haters

by *Jacob Neusner*

The Jewish Wars: Reflections by One of the Belligerents
by *Edward Alexander*

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eloquent and courageous, Edward Alexander takes the theme of anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism and transforms a mere topical debate into profound reflections on the meanings of self-hatred and bigotry: on Jews' hatred of themselves and on Gentile anti-Semitism in its most contemporary version. These occasional essays, written in the specific context of immediate controversies, transcend their occasions as Alexander pursues a single theme through diverse variations.

Jewish self-hatred is the more surprising subject, since, as a topic of public exposition, Jews' intense dislike of their own Jewishness, and the psychological and cultural consequences of that dislike, have found only a few important expositors. One was Theodore Lessing, the

Czech Zionist murdered by the Nazis, who in 1930 invented the term "Jewish self-hatred" and defined its pathology; the other, Kurt Lewin, whose writings on "leaders from the periphery" and other aspects of ethnic self-hatred, in the late 1940's, proved prescient for the next half-century of American Jewish life. Now Alexander has shown how the relationship of American Jews to Israel—involving demands that Israel display a degree of self-abnegation unparalleled by any other nation—and Israeli Jewish self-hatred have shaped debate on Israeli policy.

He writes in the aftermath of the Arabs' remarkable propaganda victory in the Intifada, which dramatically accorded to the Palestinian side the moral authority of victim and stigmatized the Israelis as oppressors. The Israeli left turned against its own country—ignoring the wisdom of Berl Katznelson, the conscience of Socialist Zionism, who in 1936 wrote, "Is there another people on earth whose sons are so emotionally and mentally twisted that they consider everything their nation does despicable and hateful, while every murder, rape, and robbery committed by their enemies fills their hearts with admiration and awe?" In his classic essay, "Antisemitism, Israeli style," Alexander proceeds to rehearse, chapter and verse, the violent self-hatred characteristic of Israelis' criticisms of their own country and its policies.

A single—remarkably sick—example suffices: the invocation of the blood libel of medieval times, which held that Jews use Gentile blood to make Passover matzot, in a poem on the Lebanon war by Yizhak Laor. Dedi Zucker, commenting on the murder of Jews burned to death in their car by a fire bomb thrown by Arab terrorists, said on the fourth day of Passover, "Palestinian brothers, the Jewish settlers need Ofra Moses' blood. They are drinking it."

The equation of Jews with Nazis—which began with British officers in Palestine who spoke, in the midst of the holocaust, of Jewish Palestine as "the Jewish Nazi state"—forms a staple of Israeli left-wing writing. Alexander's account records no story sorer than that of the government-supported Haifa Municipal Theater, which made a specialty of "the Jew as Nazi" plays. When they performed these in Germany they received uproarious applause from all but the local Jewish communities, which

condemned their plays as pure anti-Semitism.

From among the Americans, Alexander singles out Leonard Fein, David Novak, Michael Lerner, Noam Chomsky (the Jews' answer to Timothy Leary), and any number of others who qualify, in one way or another, for classification as self-hating Jews: meaning Jews who demand that the Jews be better than everybody else and condemn them for the slightest failure to conform to this fictive gold standard, and who, where the state of Israel is concerned, leap to the barricades to condemn the slightest Israeli aberration but never find fault with anyone else. Any passing cloud that shadows the Jews' light to the Gentiles betokens the next Flood, and we are no longer Noah but Sodomites.

The introduction of the Nazi metaphor into public debate on Israeli policy derives from anti-Semitic Gentiles as much as from Jews. It is one thing to criticize what Israelis do or do not do; it is quite another to evoke Adolf Hitler as the generative symbol. In this connection Conor Cruise O'Brien has said, "If your interlocutor can't keep Hitler out of the conversation . . . feverishly turning Jews into Nazis and Arabs into Jews—why then, I think, you may well be talking to an anti-Jewist." Alexander takes on a whole wolves' lair of anti-Jewists: Edward Said, Alexander Cockburn, Archbishop Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Patrick Buchanan (with special attention to his Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur sermons to the Jews of some years back), and many others. A single essay captures it all: "Why Jews must behave better than everybody else: the theory and practice of the double standard."

Alexander sets himself not only against a massive movement in contemporary politics—the Jews' own surrender of conscience and character to the care of their worst enemies—and the Western world's reversion to its long history of Jew-hatred. He also stands against another vile incubus of culture and sensibility. As a professor of English who actually believes that literature edifies, he numbers among his enemies not only the multiculturalists but the lit-crit movement, with its betrayal of literature and its barbaric prose. To underscore the issue, Alexander himself writes elegantly, imparting to his prose a dignity and craft that his enemies' writing—cited abundantly—strikingly lacks. (One of his principal targets, Edward Said, writes like