

THIS MONTH'S



FEATURED ARTICLE

Demons

from Georgia Jones

Helen Thomas, long, long-long time reporter, columnist and poster child of the White House Press Corps (which by the way any legitimate reporter can apply to join and receive credentials for), made a terrible mistake a few weeks ago. If you don't know about it the only reason I can think of is that you have had your head in the sand. If that is the case then, let me paraphrase. Helen Thomas said in the reach of a video camera: Jews go home and home is Germany and Poland.

Helen Thomas was wrong, factually, not just politically, but she was also an easy target. An older woman amidst the young and powerful *lions* of the Press Corps—a lot of her competitors were glad to be rid of her; happy for proof of her over-the-hillness; justified, they felt, in their silent disapproval of her wrinkles and her stoop... Older women, unless they are sitcom stars, are not tolerated in public places in the United States except on Mother's Day.

Unfortunately, Thomas left herself open to the attack. What she said was wrong. It was offensive, but there is no reality where we can honestly say that a lot of people don't feel that way, though most have been careful not to be caught saying it on camera. So, did she apologize for getting caught? Did she apologize for being what those who would denigrate any real discussion would call "politically incorrect"? Or did she apologize because she realized that she was wrong? I am sad to admit that I doubt that there is any chance in any dimension (including a hell) that she understood what was wrong about her statement.

Let's start with the usual suspects... When I say to people that we need to discuss the real history of the Middle East and Israel I usually get a straight-out-of-a-textbook or press release rundown of the UN decision in 1948 and the list of wars and confrontations since. Hurray for those who can memorize by rote. I am talking, though, about the real history. The one that began with the Romans, which we can slide over very quickly since it only explains why so few Jews were in their original homeland at the turn of the last century.

We could touch on the horrible persecution of Jews in Europe prior to the 1900s, but I am going to let you read about that one yourself. No, we do not need to begin with the history of the Jews to understand this problem.

Where we start is the Imperialism of European nations and the economic Imperialism of the United States, as I said, beginning around 1900. At that point, Jews in Europe (and the U.S.) still experienced significant discrimination but were not being exterminated. Jews in the Middle East, where they were a minority but a noticeable presence in their original homeland, originally shared with Palestinians and others, and a well integrated minority in almost every Arab state on that continent, lived peacefully—and, yes, there

was a minority of that minority who wanted a rollback of 2,000 years of history, the Zionists. Not all Jews or Israelis were or are Zionists.

Nor were all colonizing Europeans anti-Semitic, but many were and among those many, as the years went by, were a lot of Nazis. So, what did the Middle East learn from their European rulers? They learned to compartmentalize in a new way. Tribal societies had always had conflicts, small by today's standards, between themselves. Under European rule the tribal loyalties were attacked, divided and sometimes dissolved. The people of the Middle East learned the prejudices and loyalties of their new power brokers.

By the end of World War II, most of the Middle East—by then unrecognizable because of changed borders for the convenience of the Europeans and changed power structures implemented by their rulers—the Middle East countries had had enough of European influences, but they did not begin to rebel in a serious way until they had first purged themselves of their new enemies: the Jews—Nazi sentiments, deeply ingrained by then, and European anti-Semitism were not stopped by the end of that war. When Arab countries declared that they would "drive the Jews into the sea" the march really began on Arab soil. Over half of those Helen Thomas and others like her would send back to Poland and Germany had lived for centuries in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and other Middle Eastern states. From the Israeli point of view this threat was not only hateful, but the sea was getting closer every day.

In 1948 the UN declared that enough was enough and the Israeli's would have a stopping point. In that moment, we are often told, about 700,000 Palestinians were displaced. Actually, around 350,000 of them attacked their Jewish neighbors and another 350,000 left rather than live with the same neighbors they had shared the land with for millennia. Both groups of Palestinians were promised support by their Arab neighbors. Support that materialized as a marginalized population of Palestinians were forced into a landless state, rather than being given refuge, and used as a surrogate army (or, even, a weapon) against the former friends and neighbors they now promised to destroy.

The Palestinians, like the Israelis have traditionally been an educated, civilized people. The only excuse for the domino fall of tragedy in that part of the world is the way we (all) respond to the manipulation of reputation we call "demonization". Every country does it before declaring war. In World War II German and Japanese soldiers were, literally, portrayed in the United States with a hint of horns and clearly demonic features. It is a basic tool of war because no one lays down their life unless there is an identifiable (and hated) enemy to destroy. That is what war is.

Over the years of this Middle East Conflict, the demon face has shifted between the Palestinians and the Israelis, depending on where you were, who was leading which group and the capability of the public relations/propaganda on one side or the other. At different times, sometimes at the same time each group has behaved despicably. The current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu , a Jewish George W. Bush character, has badly handled the very real concerns of Israeli citizens and has fallen into every PR trap laid by the ever more savvy Palestinians. But, no matter what they have done or to what end, a significant number of Palestinians are suffering and a significant number of Israelis live in a state of fear that we would not tolerate in the United States.

Most of the world has lined up, chosen their demon and their victim to attack or protect, and yet both sides are equally guilty, equally sad, equally at risk and fearful... And fear is the real cause of most conflicts.

I began this article by talking about Helen Thomas and it is important to notice that she, too, has been demonized. Women all over the world are demonized by the societal definitions used to keep them in their places of oppression. Even benign philosophies such as Yin and Yang, which many Westerners embrace as exotic and transcendent, place the female spirit in the dark passive part of the equation, while the male is seen as bright, active, and significant to society. These attitudes have resulted in the killing, passive, active or before they are born, of so many girl children that a shortage of wives for those preferred males is developing in places. This is a war against women. Girl children, as the children of the Dark, have been demonized.

Older women, when they have lost their singular function: reproduction, are regularly demonized. They are portrayed as hags, crones and witches.

Demonizing anyone will always lead to bad choices, to war and oppression. The trick to being fully human is not that perfect body or the maleness we mean when we talk about action, the trick comes from accepting the humanity of our neighbors, even when it would be easy or convenient to draw horns on their pictures and attack them.