

Uncle Tom and the Happy Dhimmi: Reimagining Subjugation in the Islamic World and Antebellum South

by Eunice G. Pollack
and Stephen H.
Norwood

Muslims have long promoted myths about their harmonious relations with Jews that they allege had always prevailed in Arab lands. These myths strongly resemble those

elaborated by elites in the American South about the comity between whites and blacks in the ante-bellum and post-bellum South. Both fables enjoy wide support beyond their regions—the Muslim myths embraced by Western intellectuals and activists who challenge the need for a Jewish state; the Southern myths endorsed by Northern scholars and authors who share the white supremacist premises. All ignore or dismiss the numerous travelers’ accounts and reports that detail how Jews, like blacks in the US South, were subjugated—degraded, animalized, ghettoized, assaulted, and lynched. For both minorities, transformation and liberation came largely from external agents.



Myths of a Tranquil South

The long-standing myth of a tranquil Southern plantation society, where loyal slaves lived in harmony with paternal masters, bears a striking resemblance to the enduring image of the happy Jewish dhimmi in the Islamic world. This “teary-eyed vision” of

an antebellum Southern “Happy-Happy Land” took full form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹

Southerners viewed their social system—based on white supremacy and the heritage of slavery—as the “summit of human achievement.”² This notion led planters to press for the annexation of large portions of Mexico, in order to transform them into slave states.³ Southerners viewed Northerners as dangerous intruders who did not recognize the necessity of maintaining blacks in their inferior status.

After the Civil War, white Southerners made a determined effort to control how the American public viewed the South’s “peculiar institution,” and until the mid-twentieth century they largely succeeded in convincing the authors of textbooks and the mass media to emphasize slavery’s “benevolent features.”⁴ Northern publishing houses made sure textbooks did not contain passages that might offend Dixie’s whites. A large

A large proportion of American historians and political scientists before the 1950s described master-slave relations in the antebellum South as largely amicable.

proportion of American historians and political scientists before the 1950s described master-slave relations in the antebellum South as largely amicable.⁵ John W. Burgess, a prominent

political scientist, complained that after the mid-nineteenth century the North had regarded slavery “too much in the nature of a crime.” He insisted that plantation aristocrats considered “their relations to their slaves as a grave trust to be faithfully discharged, rather than an opportunity for exploitation.”⁶ In 1941 W. J. Cash, a leading cultural critic, concluded that the South—and its apologists—had “shut away” its record of “hate of and brutality toward the black man: ... ‘The lash? A lie, sir; it had never existed. The only bonds were those of tender understanding, trust, and loyalty.’”⁷

For a century after the Civil War, the “happy darkey” fable provided Southerners

¹ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage, 1969 [1941]), 127, 130.

² Cash, *Mind of the South*, 128–29.

³ Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery* (New York: Vintage, 1965 [1961]), 243, 257–58.

⁴ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 283–84.

⁵ “NLN Talks to Abu Ammar,” *New Left Notes*, April 17, 1969.

⁶ John W. Burgess, *Reminiscences of an American Scholar: The Founding of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 3–4.

⁷ Cash, *Mind of the South*, 131.

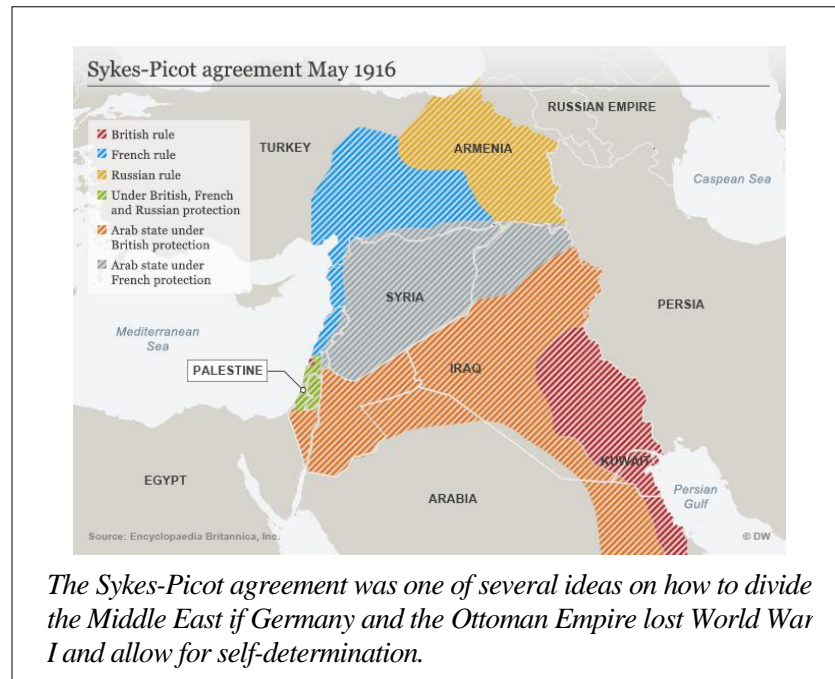
with a foundation to justify their Lost Cause. The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) sponsored essay competitions on the topic of the “Faithful Slave” and called for memorials to honor slave “mammies” for their alleged deep devotion to their owners’ children.⁸

Myth of the “Happy Relationship” Between Muslims and Jews

From the time of the Balfour Declaration (1917) Arab political and religious leaders and commentators wove a web of myths about the conditions of Jews in the Muslim lands of the Middle East over the last fourteen centuries. As one “leaps through the pages of Middle East history and surveys many eras of civilizations,” they maintained, one finds only “the same story of mutual respect between Arabs and Jews.” It was there—only there—that the Jews “could pursue their daily lives in perfect freedom and equality.” And virtually all attributed the “peaceful coexistence” to “Islam ... a most tolerant faith.”⁹

This paradise was lost, many Arab/Muslim leaders proclaimed, only upon the invasion of the foreign ideology of “political Zionism.” The concept of Jewish nationhood, they claimed, was only fashioned at the end of the nineteenth century in

response to the travails of European Jews, and had no relevance—and was allegedly of no interest—to Jewish people who dwelled in Muslim lands.¹⁰ They contended that “the fact that a Jew is a Jew has never prejudiced the Arab against him” and mocked that “the people of the Jewish religion ... are now



The Sykes-Picot agreement was one of several ideas on how to divide the Middle East if Germany and the Ottoman Empire lost World War I and allow for self-determination.

called the Jews.” As early as 1921, some insisted that it was only “England who created” the idea of a “National Home” for them, and they found it absurd that “England [could] conclude a treaty with a religion and register it in the League of Nations.”¹¹ Others

⁸ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 260, 283, 286–89.

⁹ Sami Hadawi, *Bitter Harvest: A Modern History of Palestine* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 4th ed., 1991), 8–9; Shaikh Hassan Khalid, Mufti of the Lebanon, “Speech on behalf of the Delegations to the Conference,” *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel: the Fourth Conference of the Academy of Islamic Research* (Rajab, Egypt: Al Azhar Academy of Islamic Research, 4th ed., 1970), 18. See too: Eunice G. Pollack, “Foundation Myths of Anti-Zionism,” in Eunice G. Pollack, ed., *From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism: the Past & Present of a Lethal Ideology* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017), 243.

¹⁰ Charles Bridgeman, “When Solomon Nodded: Reflections on the Partition of Palestine,” *The Living Church*, January 4, 1948, 15; Charles R. Watson, “The Partition of Palestine,” January 10, 1948, American Jewish Committee (AJC) Archives, New York; Muhammad Azzah Darwaza, “The Attitude of the Jews towards Islam, Muslims and the Prophet of Islam—P.B.U.H. at the Time of His Honourable Prophethood,” in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 36.

¹¹ Arab Executive Committee of the Haifa Congress, “Statement,” (London) *Jewish Chronicle*, May 27, 1921; Talrseen [Taseen] Basheer, “The Dilemmas of Arab/Jewish Understanding: A Guide for the Perplexed,” in *Proceedings: Palestine Day Conference* (London: General Union of Arab Students in UK and Ireland, 1966), 27.

denounced the “Zionist chauvinists,” who “use their well-placed influence” to promote their ideas “throughout the world,” and warned that they were “spreading the Jewish problem to ... Muslim countries, where it had never existed before.”¹²

Many Arabs stressed that even before “Zionist ... pretensions” threatened the “happy relationship” between Muslims and Jews, it had been disrupted by the imposition of European colonial rule.¹³ They informed their Western audiences that Jews had “enjoyed all the privileges and rights of citizenship” before colonialism introduced an “artificial separation” between Muslim and Jew. A Moroccan political leader insisted that for this reason the Jews had “welcomed” the overthrow of colonial rule and the return of “Arabization” and the establishment of the independent Muslim nation.¹⁴

Contrary to the Arabs’ contentions, however, it was the colonial powers that had extended citizenship (e.g., Algeria in 1870), equality or near-equality (e.g., the French Protectorate in Morocco, 1912–1956) to the Jews, liberating them at last from their status as subjugated, humiliated dhimmis, and ending the oppressive *jizya*, the tribute always exacted by the Muslims. Thus Jews had strongly endorsed the colonial presence, generally embracing modern European education and culture.¹⁵ It was under British

occupation (1882–1922) that Jews in Egypt felt safest. Notably, under Islamic rule, it was only the Ottoman Empire that, in an effort to secure European support—and modern weapons—issued an Imperial Edict (1856) that, in theory, extended equal rights to all its subjects. In practice, however, Ottoman governors (*pashas*) confined themselves to collecting taxes, while local rulers and the populace—for example, the Mamluks in Egypt—continued to persecute, pillage, and impose additional “heavy levies” on the Jews. Thus most Jews not only supported European colonial rule, but feared the independence movements, with the threat of return to their earlier subordinate “social, political and economic” positions.¹⁶

Islamic Myths about Jews’ Inherent Traits

Arab commentators readily dismissed over two centuries of travelers’ accounts and investigative reports that belied their claims about the conditions and contentment of Jews under Islamic rule. They simply turned to another hoary myth in order to protect their current fable. The Arabs discarded all the testimony that contradicted their narrative, explaining that it had been derived largely from Jews, whom the Qur’an characterized as

¹² Institute of Arab American Affairs, “Advertisement: Arabs Want Peace in Palestine! So Do the Jews, But the Political Zionists are Bent on Violence,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1946. See too: Riaz Hassan, “Interrupting a History of Tolerance: Anti-Semitism and the Arabs,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37 (2009): 458.

¹³ Institute of Arab American Affairs, “Arabs Want Peace in Palestine!”

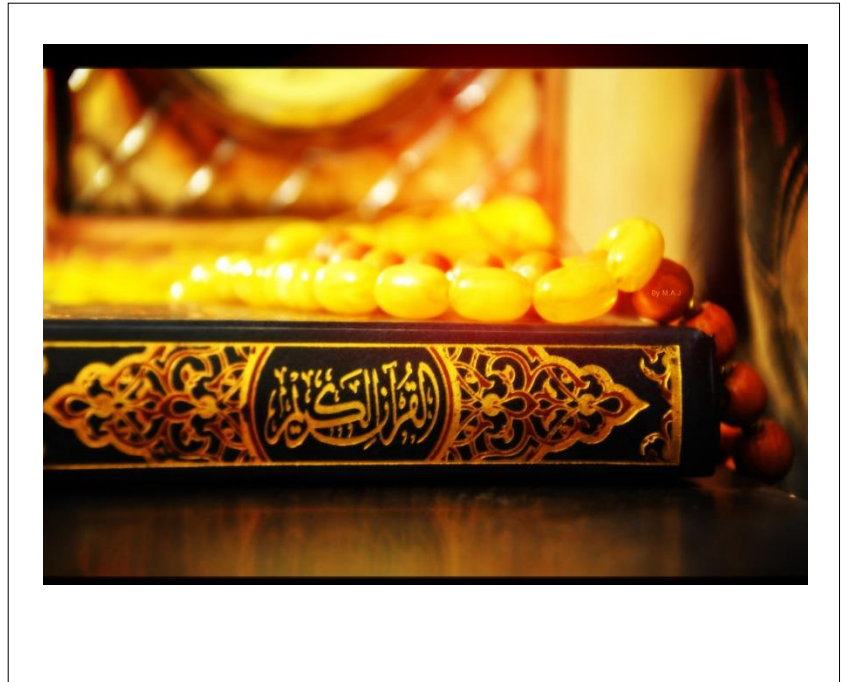
¹⁴ Michael M. Laskier, “Zionism and the Jewish Communities of Morocco,” *Studies in Zionism* 6:1 (1985): 128–30; El Mehdi ben Aboud, *Moroccans of the Jewish Faith* (Arab Information Center, 1961), 5–7, 12–13.

¹⁵ Laskier, “Zionism and the Jewish Communities,” 119–20; Norman A. Stillman, “Myth, Countermyth, and Distortion,” *Tikkun*, May/June 1991, 62–63.

¹⁶ Jacob M. Landau, “Cairo,” in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com>; Jacob M. Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 125; Maurice M. Roumani, *The Case of the Jews from Arab Countries: A Neglected Issue* (Tel-Aviv: World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries, 1978), 23.

congenitally deceitful, never to be trusted.¹⁷ The Palestinian-Arab leader Yasir Arafat drew on the Qur'anic allegations about Jews' inherent traits in 2000, when he informed President Clinton that he was certain the Jews dissembled, and there had never been a First or Second Temple in Jerusalem at which they had worshipped.¹⁸

At times, political and religious leaders conceded that the Jews in Muslim lands had been relentlessly subjugated, relying on another large cache of myths, drawn or extrapolated from the Qur'an, to sanctify their abasement of those they now identified as "the dogs of humanity." Indeed, from the earliest years of Islam, Muslims had understood that "their deadliest enemies were the Jews."¹⁹ They were the only people cursed in the Qur'an, whom Allah had promised "degradation in this world and a mighty chastisement in the next world." Muslim theologians recognized that the Jews were "like germs of a malignant disease where one germ is sufficient to eliminate an entire nation." But, they taught, "the Holy Qur'an ... constitutes the microscope through which we can see the pests and poisons that reside in their minds and hearts." Thanks to Qur'anic



lessons on how to subdue the Jews, the Muslims were "the only people on earth to tolerate them" in their midst.²⁰

Citing the Qur'an, prominent Muslim educators portrayed the Jews as driven throughout their history to bring "blind sedition ... and intrigue in any land or community where they happened to live." Some suggested that this was likely "why the Israelites ... were so detested by all surrounding tribes."²¹ Others explained that "the Jews themselves have not changed"

¹⁷ Darwaza, "Attitude of the Jews towards Islam," 33; Robert S. Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession* (New York: Random House, 2010), 788–89; Pollack, "Foundation Myths of Anti-Zionism," 247; Ephraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, updated ed., 2007), 188.

¹⁸ Robert S. Wistrich, *Parallel Lines: Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the 21st Century* (Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2013), 12, 16; Erskine Childers, [untitled speech], *Proceedings: Palestine Day Conference*, 50.

¹⁹ D. F. Green [David G. Littman], "Introduction," *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 8; Sheikh Abdul-Hamid 'Attayah al-Dibani, "The Jewish Attitude Towards Islam and Muslims in Early Islam," in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 40.

²⁰ Abdul Sattar El Sayed, Mufti of Tursos, Syria, "The Jews in the Qur'an," in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 42; Kamal Ahmed Own, "The Jews are the Enemies of Human Life as Evidenced by their Holy Book," in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 24.

²¹ Sattar El Sayed, "The Jews in the Qur'an," 41, 43; Arab Executive Committee of the Haifa Congress, "Statement."

because,
“according to ...
their false
Torah,” they
“are required to
stir war with
their neighbors
once they have

the opportunity to do so.” Some added that the Jews often preferred to deploy “conspiracies, plots, intrigues [and] sedition” because they were inherently “cowards and could not openly face their enemy.”²²

Not acknowledging a contradiction, many spokesmen insisted that “the Jews have always been criminal aggressors.” Jews claim that they are victims, “subjected [throughout] their long history” to “oppression and persecution” “for no other reason than their being followers of Moses.” In truth, “the hatred felt by various peoples ... for Jews was not due to their belief, but their ... unchangeable behavior, always based on exploitation, ingratitude and evil-doing in return for kindness.” That is, the “criminal aggressors” only deceptively identify as innocent victims.²³ Educators taught that the Jews are “avaricious, ruthless, cruel, hypocritical and revengeful. These traits govern their lives.” They point out that the Qur’an warned that, if permitted, the Jews would “become great tyrants.” They conclude: “No good is expected of them unless they live under the aegis of Islam as loyal and obedient subjects.” Then the Muslims “will treat them ... tolerantly.” “Islamic tolerance is,” after all, in complete contrast to “Jewish intolerance and cruelty.”²⁴

**Educators taught that the Jews are
“avaricious, ruthless, cruel,
hypocritical and revengeful. These
traits govern their lives.”**

Jewish Origins of the Muslim Myths

The Arabs’ narrative that held that Jews fleeing from barbaric treatment in Europe had always found refuge and a

warm welcome in Muslim lands had roots in the works of nineteenth-century Jewish intellectuals, who had grown profoundly disillusioned by the results of and reactions to Jewish Emancipation in Christian countries. Heinrich Graetz contrasted “Jewish life under Christianity,” “an unremitting ... tale of tribulation,” with that under Islamic rule, where, he presumed, “the sons of Judah ... did not need to look out with fear and humiliation.” Unlike Islam, which allowed Jews, who shared “Semitic descent” with the Arabs, to flourish, Christianity, from its inception “betrayed its hostile attitude toward the Jews, and gave rise to those malignant decrees of Constantine and his successors, which laid the foundation of the bloody persecutions of subsequent centuries.” Similarly, it was Ignaz Goldziher’s blinding rage at Christianity, “the most abominable of all religions,” that can explain his idealized view of Islam, which “had not discriminated against the Jews living in its orbit as Christianity had done.” After all, he confided to his diary, “The forehead of a whore—that

²² Sheikh Abd Allah Al Meshad, “Jews’ Attitude Towards Islam and Muslims in the First Islamic Era,” in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 28.

²³ Dr. Said Abdel Fattah Ashour, “Jews in the Middle Ages: Comparative Study of East and West,” in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 46.

²⁴ Moh. Taha Yahia, “the Attitude of the Jews Towards Islam and Muslims in the Early Days of Islam,” in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, 25; Qur’an Sura 17:417; Own, “The Jews are the Enemies of Human Life,” 19, 23.

is the forehead of Christianity.”²⁵

Arabs also drew on the romanticized image fashioned by writers in the nineteenth century of the lives of Sephardim in the so-called “golden age” of Muslim Spain, circa 800–1250. To a young Benjamin Disraeli, who had been born a Jew (and who would twice become prime minister of England), these were “halcyon centuries” in which the “children of Ishmael rewarded the children of Israel with equal rights and privileges with themselves.” In the vision of his (Jewish) cousin, Elias Haim Lindo, dramatized in his *History of the Jews in Spain and Portugal* (1846), “Jews had flourished under Muslim Spain, had been driven from Christian Spain, and had found a refuge in Muslim Turkey.”

But as the historian Bernard Lewis flatly observed, “The golden age of equal rights was a myth.”²⁶ Moreover, these were the years of a flourishing mercantile economy, in which pre-Islamic traditions remained strong, and “Hellenistic humanism and ... remnants of the ancient heritage of the Near East” persisted, and it was this, not the supposed munificence of Islam, that accounted for the relative tolerance toward Jews. Still, it was the myths “invented by Jews in nineteenth-century Europe,” which, Lewis explained, would be “taken up by Muslims in our own time as a reproach to Jews.”²⁷

The myth of Arab-Jewish comity and parity in Islamic lands found more advocates beginning in the mid-1950s, as scholars and activists in the West embraced what Lewis

dubbed the “mystique of Third Worldism, ... a new variant of the old golden-age myth,” now relocated to formerly colonized lands. In the current paradigm, the cultures and belief-systems of the colonized were celebrated, with the now discredited Western powers held responsible for the societies’ conflicts and travails.²⁸ It was with the Suez War of 1956 that this intellectual model came increasingly to be applied to the Middle East, as Britain and France were widely seen as attempting to reassert their control in the region. Although Israel joined the fray in large part to quell the persistent attacks on its population by *fedayeen* in the Sinai, it was now cast as the junior partner in the imperialist drive. The discourse became even more politicized, more strident, in the 1960s, with Zionism now starring as the last imperialist villain of the drama, when over the course of the Six Day War against the fourteen nations of the Arab League, Israel captured East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Gaza strip, and the Sinai. Now scholars and commentators, especially those on the left, redoubled their efforts to portray the interfaith—and interracial—utopia that had allegedly prevailed in Arab lands before the imperialist invasions and the founding of the Jewish state, when a tolerant Islam ensured civil rights, security, equality and religious freedom to Jewish minorities. Ignoring centuries of travelers’ accounts and investigative reports, they turned reality on its head.

²⁵ John M. Efron, “Orientalism and the Jewish Historical Gaze,” in Ivan Davidson Kalman and Derek Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 85–86, 91–92. See too: Marc Cohen, “Islam and the Jews: Myth, Countermyth, History,” in Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner, eds., *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 50–63; Norman A. Stillman, “The Moroccan Jewish Experience: A Revisionist View,” in Andrew G. Bostom, ed., *The Legacy of Islamic Anti-Semitism: From Sacred Texts to Solemn History* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008), 549.

²⁶ Bernard Lewis, “The Pro-Islamic Jews,” *Judaism* 17:4 (1968): 401–2.

²⁷ Lewis, “Pro-Islamic Jews,” 402; Stillman, “Myth, Countermyth, and Distortion,” 61. See too: Daniel Pipes, “Review of Martin Kramer, ed., *The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis*,” *Commentary*, March 2000.

²⁸ Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, 52.

When the Jewish essayist Albert Memmi, who was born in Tunisia in 1920 and educated in Algeria, moved to France, he was startled to come “face-to-face with a fable that was very popular among the left-wingers in Paris ... that the Jews had always lived in perfect harmony with the Arabs.” He was “almost congratulated on having been born in one of those countries where race discrimination and xenophobia were unknown.” Memmi understood this was “nonsense”—“countertruth”—and that “it is time to denounce this fraud.” Memmi was also distressed that Jules Isaac, the French Jewish intellectual whom he generally admired, had identified “true antisemitism” only as “the result of Christianity.” Memmi explained, “I am sorry to say that by making antisemitism a Christian creation, Isaac minimized the tragedy of the Jews in the Arab countries and helped to create a false understanding of the question.”²⁹

Islam and the Degradation of the Jews in Arab Lands

Although Isaac and others prefer to attach the label of antisemitism only to forms of Jew-hatred derived from Christian teachings, it was Islam that provided the main ingredients of the poison that was endemic in Arab lands. Indeed, it was Muhammad who legitimized lethal pogroms. As the historian

Muhammad initiated the violent conflict with the Jewish tribes of the Medina oasis after they had rejected his identification as the last prophet, the successor to Moses.

Ephraim Karsh has shown, the Muslim leader’s first raids were on the Jewish tribes of the Medina oasis because their “affluence made them a natural target for plunder.” This was the first time he commanded his followers to initiate *jihad*. Seizing the Jews’ land and belongings, and presenting them as spoils to his followers, Muhammad also had six hundred to eight hundred men of the Quraiza tribe beheaded, “the women and children ... sold into slavery,” “the money they fetched ... divided among the Muslims.”³⁰

Muhammad initiated the violent conflict with the Jewish tribes of the Medina oasis after they had rejected his identification as the last prophet, the successor to Moses. It was only then that his followers would pray facing Mecca instead of Jerusalem; that they learned it was Ishmael whom Abraham had brought to be sacrificed—in Mecca. Henceforth, Muslims would express and experience their superiority and the supremacy of their religion through the abasement, above all, of the Jews, who had been too “puffed up with pride” to recognize the “final revelation” granted to Muhammad. It was the Jews whom the Qur’an animalized as the “descendants of apes and pigs.”³¹

Drawn from Qur’anic mandates, and first codified in the eighth-century Pact of ‘Umar, Jews (and Christians)—“People of the Book”—would be allowed to “remain alive” only as subjugated dhimmis, debased,

²⁹ Albert Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew?” *Keeping Posted*, January 1977, 6-7.

³⁰ Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*, 14-15. Some Muslims, by contrast, contend that the Quraiza tribe was attacked first because “they had been the strongest, the richest and the most pernicious and harmful ones.” Darwaza, “Attitude of the Jews towards Islam,” 35.

³¹ Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession*, 771-72, 794.

persecuted—their existence “based on sufferance, not rights”—all acknowledging “the privileged superiority of the true believer” and “the one true faith.” The precise stipulations of “the Pact” would vary over time and place.³² Still, from the middle of the twelfth century, Jews were the only dhimmis left in the Maghreb, and in the Middle East—where dhimmis included both Christians and Jews—the Jews remained vulnerable while Christians could secure the protection of European ecclesiastical and political authorities or flee to Christian states. Thus an observer in Morocco at the beginning of the nineteenth century found that “Despite all the services the Jews render the Moors, they are treated by them with more disdain than they treat their animals.” A hundred years later a British official in Iraq concluded flatly that Muslims treated Jews “as a master might treat a slave.”³³

In some Islamic lands, most pervasively in those under Shi’a rule, the abasement reflected the perception of the Jew as “both ritually polluted and polluting.” A Jew who entered a Muslim’s house had to “sit on a separate rug.” Any object the Jew touched had been contaminated, and could no longer be used by a Muslim. Expressing their dominance and contempt, Muslims would enter a Jew’s house at will, “seize any

household object to their liking”—and the Jewish owner dared not protest. Nor would he complain to a court, where “a Jew could never win a case ... against a Muslim.” Indeed, even the murder of a Jew—if “witnesses could be found”—was generally punished by a fine, or “at worst, a beating.”³⁴

Determined to sustain the myth of Islamic tolerance, some commentators alleged that the Muslims only attacked the Jews when they perceived they had “overstepped their limits.”³⁵ This, in effect, blames the Jews for any ensuing massacres. For the most part, however, Jews “trod a very cautious path,” and cleaved to the stipulations that defined the dhimmi role. As required, Jews took care that the heights of their houses were lower than those of Muslims, that they stepped off a path or yielded the center of the road when a Muslim passed by, that they never mounted a horse, prohibited because it was seen to have “martial qualities,” and never bore arms. In order to convey their inferiority to Muslims, Jews in Yemen “dressed like beggars” and made sure their houses appeared “not just modest ... but decrepit.” As compelled, they wore the yellow Jew badge of shame or a red cloth on their chest, telegraphing their identity.³⁶ In the early twentieth century, Jews had to agree to their humiliation, when they were “made to jump and dance, thus

³² Roumani, *Case of the Jews from Arab Countries*, 23-24; Lewis, “Pro-Islamic Jews,” 402; Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History: Ideas, People, and Events in the Middle East* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2nd ed., 2001), 116.

³³ Jane S. Gerber, “The Pact of ‘Umar in Morocco: A Reappraisal of Muslim-Jewish Relations,” in Bostom, ed., *Legacy*, 520-21, 523 n.3; Jane S. Gerber, “Discussion,” in *Proceedings of the Seminar on Muslim-Jewish Relations in North Africa* (New York: World Jewish Congress, 1975), 69; “Exploding a Myth: Arabs had Never Discriminated against Jews in the Past, President Sadat said last week,” (London) *Jewish Chronicle*, November 7, 1975; Norman A. Stillman, “Muslims and Jews in Morocco: Perceptions, Images, Stereotypes,” in *Proceedings of the Seminar on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, 15; AJC, “‘Some of Our Best Friends ...’—The Claim of Arab Tolerance: A Background Memorandum,” December 1975, AJC Archives, New York.

³⁴ Laurence Loeb, “‘Outcaste’: Shi’a Intolerance,” in Bostom, ed., *Legacy*, 564–66.

³⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986, 1999), 124.

³⁶ Gerber, “Pact of ‘Umar,” 520; “Exploding a Myth”; AJC, “‘Some of Our Best Friends ...’”; Loeb, “‘Outcaste’”, 564; Edmond Fagnan, “The Distinctive Sign of the Jews in Maghreb,” in Bostom, ed., *Legacy*, 491–92; Stillman, “Moroccan Jewish Experience,” 552.

provoking the mirth of the Muslims and satisfying their scorn for the Jews.” Elsewhere in the same years, Muslims animalized the Jews, chasing them “like a herd of beasts across fields” and “making us eat the dust.”³⁷

Yet no matter how closely Jews adhered to the exigencies of the dhimmi contract, they could not always avoid the Muslims’ wrath, as they perceived nonexistent affronts. Having been taught by Allah, as recorded in the Qur’an, that “Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe to be the Jews and the idolaters,” with clergy pointing out that the Jews appeared “prior to the latter,” many readily accused the Jews of blaspheming Islam. Thus whenever a group of Arabs chose to assault a Jew, they justified their attack by claiming he had insulted the prophet or blasphemed Islam, certain they would be considered heroes of the faith.³⁸

Similarly, Muslims perceived any violation of the Pact, real or imagined, as an occasion for a pogrom, targeting the Jewish quarter. Here, too, commentators attempting to narrow the enmity, claimed that “angry Muslims would invade the Jewish quarters” only “once in a while,” or only “in moments of upheaval and disruption.” Some tried to minimize the impact of the invaders by asserting that “they rarely killed people.” In an effort to evade the singular importance of Jew-hatred, others stressed that the Jewish ghettos were not the only quarters besieged. Their caveats, however, missed the mark. The historian Jane Gerber, for example, found that the incursions into the *mellahs* (Jewish ghettos of Morocco) did not reflect “extraordinary

situations” and were not confined to times of social disintegration.³⁹ And, as the historian Norman Stillman concluded, “Jewish sources make clear” that there was “frequent loss of life in addition to the standard pillage and rape.” He added that although Jews “shared in



An undated photo taken in the Jewish quarter of a Libyan city.

general suffering, ... it was abundantly clear to all that Jews were at the very bottom of the ladder.... The *mellah* was usually looted before any other quarter of the city.”⁴⁰

Contemporary accounts of pogroms targeting *mellahs* all across Morocco in the decade before the establishment of the French Protectorate are harrowing, providing vivid descriptions of “the robbing, looting, raping, killing and burning,” and the “cunning” attackers who “closed any escape route.” In the Casablanca ghetto, “not a house, not a family, not a person was spared ... only five to six Jewish houses ... remained intact.” All furniture was smashed or stolen; all clothing taken; Jews were left naked, even nightshirts gone. Thirty Jews were murdered; sixty wounded, “more than two hundred fifty young women, girls, children abducted.” “All the

³⁷ David Littman, “Jews under Muslim Rule—II: Morocco, 1903-1912,” *Wiener Library Bulletin* 29 (1976): 12-13.

³⁸ al-Dibani, “Jewish Attitude towards Islam,” 39; Georges Vajda, “‘Adversos-Judaeus’: A Treatise from Maghrib—‘Ahkamahl al-Dhimma’ by Sayh Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Karim al-Magili,” in Bostom, ed., *Legacy*, 345-46, 351; Littman, “Jews under Muslim Rule,” 5-6.

³⁹ Stuart Schaar, “Discussion,” in *Proceedings of the Seminar on Muslim-Jewish Relations*,” 30; Gerber, “Pact of ‘Umar,” 522.

⁴⁰ Stillman, “Muslims and Jews in Morocco,” 17, 17 n.11.

young girls were raped.” The *mellah* of Settat, sacked in 1903, was rebuilt by the Jews only to be attacked again four years later, three hundred to four hundred families once more “without shelter and without food,” the men looking “like ghosts,” the women, emaciated and almost “nude.”⁴¹

In numberless Jewish quarters in these years—and over the centuries in which Jews lived under Muslim rule—synagogues were “pillaged and sacked,” sacred objects “profaned,” Torah scrolls “lacerated” and thrown into the street.⁴² At other times synagogues were torched or turned into mosques—the oft-repeated claim that Islam protected the “right [of People of the Book] to practice their own religions” proven hollow again and again.⁴³ And because the pogromists were drawn from all ranks of Muslims and included political officials and religious leaders, few attackers were ever punished.⁴⁴

The Threat of the Jewish and Black Soldier

White American Southerners, during and after slavery, considered blacks innately cowardly and obsequious, and thus unqualified for military service. They also feared that black soldiers bearing weapons would project power, threatening the racial caste system. Middle Eastern Muslims held similar views about Jews, whom they consigned to the lowly dhimmi position.

Islamic countries generally barred Jews from bearing arms. Confederate troops who encountered black Union soldiers viewed them with hatred and disgust, resulting in some horrific atrocities, most notably the

Jews lynched in Muslim lands from the 1940s onward were often accused of being agents of Zionism.

infamous Fort Pillow Massacre in 1864. The Confederacy would not officially accord prisoner-of-war (POW) status to captured black soldiers, and on many occasions its troops murdered them.⁴⁵ At Fort Pillow, black soldiers, having thrown down their arms, were “deliberately shot.” The Confederates burned wounded black soldiers to death, setting fire to their tents.⁴⁶ Similarly, Arab armies often refused to consider Jewish soldiers they captured in the Arab-Israeli wars to be POWs.

In the first half of the twentieth century, white Southerners, perceiving African American soldiers as a potential threat to the racial order—now based on legal segregation and black disfranchisement—insisted that they acknowledge their racial inferiority by publicly displaying deference whenever encountering whites. White officers of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, one of only four African American regiments in the U.S. Army

⁴¹ Littman, “Jews under Muslim Rule,” 8–10; S. Landshut, *Jewish Communities in the Muslim Countries of the Middle East: A Survey* (Westport, CN: Hyperion Press, 1950, 1976), 12–13.

⁴² Littman, “Jews under Muslim Rule,” 13; Eliezer Bashan, “New Documents on Attacks on Jewish Religious Observance in Morocco in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in Bostom, ed., *Legacy*, 526–30; Gerber, “Pact of ‘Umar,” 521.

⁴³ Daniel Pipes, “the Politics of Muslim Anti-Semitism,” *Commentary*, August 1981, 40.

⁴⁴ Bashan, “New Documents,” 526–30.

⁴⁵ In early 1863, shortly after the Union began enlisting African American troops, the Confederate Congress made it clear that black soldiers would be executed or enslaved if taken prisoner. James M. McPherson, *Embattled Rebel: Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 170–71.

⁴⁶ “The Fort Pillow Horror—The Report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 1864.

prior to World War I, strenuously objected when the Army transferred it from Nebraska to Brownsville, Texas in 1906. After the regiment arrived in Brownsville, townspeople complained that the African American soldiers, many of whom had served in combat in the Indian and Spanish-American wars, were not stepping aside when they encountered white people on the sidewalks. One of the regiment's white officers told an official of the courts of the southern district of Texas that his black troops "had as much right upon the streets and sidewalks of Brownsville as any white man." The court official then informed the officer that "as long as he was in the South ... when a negro [sic] and white man met on the sidewalk the negro [sic] would have to step aside."⁴⁷



The lynching of Laura (right) and L.D. Nelson (left) in Okemah, Oklahoma in 1911. The victims were mother and son, killed by a mob of white men.

The Lynching Spectacle: Terrorizing Blacks and Jews

White Southerners and Middle Eastern Muslims used lynching to intimidate,

terrify, and degrade African Americans and Jews, respectively. Lynching involved the public torture and killing of a person, most often by hanging but sometimes by burning, shooting, or skinning alive. It commanded the support of many public officials in the regions where it occurred. In the South, advance notice of the lynching was often given so that large numbers of people could attend. The corpse was often left on display and was usually mutilated. Lynching was an important phenomenon of Southern life from 1890 to World War II. In the Muslim Middle East, lynchings persisted even longer.⁴⁸

Jews lynched in Muslim lands from the 1940s onward were often falsely accused of being agents of Zionism. The lynching in Basra of one of Iraq's wealthiest Jews, Shafiq Ades, on September 22, 1948, provided the occasion for masses of Muslims to openly display their intense antisemitism. After a quick trial "behind closed doors," a military court sentenced Ades, a non-Zionist, to death for shipping surplus British army weapons to Jews in Palestine and for "organizing Zionism" in Iraq. Ades insisted he was innocent. The Baghdad newspaper *Al Yaqthah* estimated that more than 15,000 people witnessed Ades put to death, a crowd that did not include a single Jew.⁴⁹

Al Yaqthah demonized Ades and associated him with filth, describing how "his dirty body hung in the air amidst the victorious cheers of the crowd." A doctor examined his corpse and testified that "his devilish soul had parted his defiled body." Ades's body was left hanging for two hours,

⁴⁷ Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 84–85, 265n26.

⁴⁸ On lynching in the American South, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 184–88.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Resner, *Eternal Stranger: The Plight of the Modern Jew From Baghdad to Casablanca* (New York: Doubleday, 1951), 139–41; "Iraq Merchant to Die for Aid to Palestine," *New York Times*, September 14, 1948; "Wealthy Jew Hanged for Treason in Iraq," *Washington Post*, September 25, 1948.

“during which time a great number of photographs were taken.” In a final humiliation, the crowd “heap[ed] excrement on the dead body.”⁵⁰

The public hangings in Baghdad in 1969 of eleven “accused Israeli spies,” most of them Iraqi Jews, provided another example of the numerous lynchings of Jews in Muslim lands. The *New York Times* described the festive atmosphere in Baghdad’s Independence Square, with spectators “shouting and dancing around the square” as the bodies were hanging. The brother of one of the murdered Jews, a refugee in the United States, told the *Times* that “Jewish men, women, and children [in Iraq] are picked up at random and are brutally given over for public hangings.”⁵¹

For North African Muslims in the early decades of the twentieth century, for whom the Jew was a powerless dhimmi, the Jewish soldier in French uniform elicited a rage similar to that which white Southerners expressed toward African Americans in the Union army. In 1934, Muslims precipitated a large-scale pogrom in Constantine, Algeria’s third-largest city, by spreading a false rumor that a Jewish Zouave, a decorated member of a French infantry unit, had committed sacrilege in a mosque. Jews constituted about ten percent of Constantine’s population. The Jewish death toll in Constantine may have

surpassed the forty-nine murdered in the Kishinev pogrom in Bessarabia in 1903.⁵²

Fury at the Zouave who rejected the submission required of a dhimmi drove some two thousand frenzied Muslims to invade Constantine’s Jewish quarter and massacre Jews. Muslims claimed that on Friday, August 3, 1934, Eliahou Kalif, a Zouave, barged drunk into a mosque during evening prayers, made insulting remarks about Islam, and urinated on the mosque wall. To reach his home Kalifa had to walk through a passageway past the mosque, whose ablutions room un-customarily had two windows open, close to and facing his dwelling. Kalifa stated that he had asked the worshippers to close the windows so that his wife and five children would not have to witness the ablutions, for which the men removed part or all of their clothing.⁵³

During the pogrom, Muslims methodically attacked Jewish homes, killing and looting, and destroyed most Jewish shops. The London *Times* reported that the Muslims dragged Jews into the street and butchered them “like sheep.” The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* stated that Muslims locked Jews in their homes and set them on fire, burning entire families to death. The pogromists slashed Jewish children to death, almost

⁵⁰ Resner, *Eternal Stranger*, 141, 143.

⁵¹ “Festivities Give Way to Murmurs in Iraq in Wake of Hangings,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1969; “A Victim’s Brother, Here, Laments for Iraqi Jews,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1969.

⁵² Richard Ayoun, “À Propos du Pogrom de Constantine (Août 1934),” *Revue des Études juives*, CXLIV (January-September 1985), 182–86. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency’s correspondent who toured Constantine immediately after the pogrom described “a scene of utter desolation and horror,” and commented: “the only comparison I can think of is the Palestine riots of 1929.” “Algeria Riots Checked,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)*, August 8, 1934. Edward H. Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 72.

⁵³ “The Constantine Pogrom,” *Palestine Post*, September 5, 1934; Ayoun, “À Propos du Pogrom,” 182. Kalifa had been awarded a military medal. “Le Populaire ’ en Algérie,” *Le Populaire*, August 31, 1934 and September 1, 1934.

beheading some of them. They cut off Jewish girls' breasts.⁵⁴

The French socialist party newspaper *Le Populaire* undermined the Muslim claim that Kalifa's alleged "one-man invasion" of a mosque had caused the pogrom to break out spontaneously. It demonstrated that Muslim massacres of Jews and pillaging of Jewish stores had begun two days before in Sétif, Algeria, seventy-five miles away, and had then spread to Constantine. *Le Populaire* pointed out that if Kalifa, a Jew, had entered the mosque, much less "profaned [its] sacred soil," he would have required "transport to a hospital."⁵⁵

The Degradation of Jewish Dhimmi Prisoners of War

Confederate and Muslim Arab troops dehumanized their African American and Jewish adversaries, manifested in particularly brutal, often murderous treatment of prisoners of war. The head of the Confederate Bureau of War declared: "No people . . . could tolerate . . . [an enemy's] use of savages [against them]." Confederates regarded most black Union soldiers they took prisoner as "property recaptured."⁵⁶ Egyptian cameraman Mohammed Gohar, assigned to film Israeli POWs captured on the east bank of the Suez Canal in the first days after the Egyptian army's surprise invasion on Yom Kippur,

1973, recalled his shock upon encountering them: "All he knew of them were the grotesque cartoons in Cairo newspapers" of Israeli leaders, depicted as rodents, snakes, or horned demons. Gohar was "surprised to see that the [Israeli] soldiers looked perfectly normal.... All he had heard about Israelis, all he had learned about them in school, had not prepared him for this."⁵⁷

During the Arab-Israeli wars, Arab armies systematically tortured and degraded Israeli POWs, and committed horrific atrocities, treatment considered appropriate for contemptible dhimmis. During Israel's 1948 War of Independence, Arab forces decapitated twenty-nine Haganah soldiers captured or killed in the attack on the Arab fortress of Nebi Yusha—an act modeled on Muhammad's beheading of the men of the Quraiza tribe following their surrender in the seventh century CE.⁵⁸ In the same war, after more than 3,000 Arab troops surrounded and overwhelmed 200 Haganah soldiers in a thirty-six hour battle at Nebi Daniel, they stripped, mutilated, and photographed the bodies of the Jewish dead. Correspondent John Roy Carlson reported that such "naked shots hit the 'Holy' City markets afresh after every battle and sold rapidly." Arabs carried the photographs "in their wallets and displayed them frequently."⁵⁹

Arabs committed similar atrocities in subsequent wars. For example, the Egyptians

⁵⁴ "100 Slain, 300 Hurt as Arabs and Jews Clash in Algeria," *New York Times*, August 7, 1934; "The Algerian Riots," *Times* (London), August 8, 1934; "Arabs Slash Girls' Throats," *Washington Post*, August 9, 1934; "Algeria Riots Checked"; "Arabs Massacre Jews in Algeria," *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent*, August 10, 1934; "Les Sanglants événements de Constantine," *Le Populaire*, August 9, 1934.

⁵⁵ "Le Gouvernement dissimule la vérité sur la situation en Algérie," *Le Populaire*, August 10, 1934; *Le "Populaire" en Algérie: Pogrom 1934*, *Le Populaire*, August 30 and 31, 1934; "Pogrom Kept Secret," *JTA*, August 10, 1934.

⁵⁶ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 792.

⁵⁷ Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Schocken, 2004), 277–78.

⁵⁸ Stephen H. Norwood, *Antisemitism and the American Far Left* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 133.

⁵⁹ John Roy Carlson, *Cairo to Damascus* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 171–72.

murdered Moshe Goldwasser, an Israeli pilot shot down over Egypt during the 1970 War of Attrition, two days after his capture. The day after he was taken prisoner, a photograph in Cairo newspapers showed him in apparent good health. When the Egyptians returned his body to the Israelis four weeks later, he was missing a testicle and the skin had been removed from his wrists to conceal marks of torture.⁶⁰



Israeli forces prepare for an attack on the Sinai during the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

During the Yom Kippur War, Israeli troops discovered a booklet that the Egyptian army “issued in [the] thousands” to its troops, instructing them to kill Israeli soldiers they captured. The foreword, by the Egyptian army chief of staff, invoked the longstanding Muslim stereotype of the deceitful Jew: “This is a nation of cheats who will behave as if they were surrendering in order to bluff you and then kill you. Kill them and don’t show them any pity or mercy.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ “Cairo Torture Alleged,” *Guardian* (London), October 6, 1970.

⁶¹ “Israel Claims Egyptians Killed POWs,” *Guardian* (London), December 10, 1973.

⁶² “Israel Charges POW Tortures,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 13, 1974; “Israel MPs Told of Torturing of Prisoners by the Syrians,” *Times* (London), June 13, 1974.

Israeli Defense Minister Shimon Peres stated that in the Yom Kippur War Syria “not only flouted Geneva Convention rules but sank beneath any human standard practiced in war or peace.” The Syrians had tortured Israeli POWs with “electric shocks, tearing out of fingernails and toenails, whipping, and blows on open wounds.”⁶² The Syrians had “fired at point blank range at [Israeli] pilots bailing out” and, as at Fort Pillow in the Civil War, “at soldiers who had thrown down their arms.” Israel also formally accused the Syrians of murdering at least forty-two Israeli POWs, and the Egyptians of murdering at least twenty-eight. It reported that “one Moroccan soldier had a sack filled with parts of bodies” of slain Israeli soldiers, “including arms and tongues, which he intended sending home as souvenirs.”⁶³

Conclusion

Both the American South and the Arab/Muslim lands were hierarchical, martial societies, convinced they had achieved the highest level of civilization through their culture, belief system, and way of life. Their deeply held ideologies of white and Islamic supremacy demanded the subjugation of blacks in the former case and Jews in the latter. Domination involved not just expropriation or the *jizya*, but relentless humiliation and degradation, which was evident to, and condemned by, many travelers from outside the Muslim and Southern orbits. Arabs and white Southerners maintained that because of their innate traits, Jews and blacks required the superordinate group’s controls. They used their respective belief-systems to

⁶³ “Israel Accuses Egypt of Killing 28 Prisoners,” *Times* (London), December 10, 1973. Israel reported that all of the sixty-eight Israeli POWs repatriated from Syria had been tortured. “Israel Claims Torture of all its POWs,” *Guardian* (London), June 8, 1974.

justify their societal arrangements, certain they were endorsed by God. In each case, elevation of the status and improvement of the conditions of blacks and dhimmi Jews came only as a result of invasions from outside—Northern armies and occupation and European political and cultural penetration. In both societies, granting equal or near-equal rights evoked massive resistance and violence by the erstwhile dominant groups, as their worlds were turned upside down.

White Southerners and Arab Muslims fashioned layers of myths that obscured the brutality and dehumanization of the subjugated peoples. Few, if any, within the dominant group questioned the myths or social arrangements. The white South and the Muslims of the Middle East and the Maghreb were wholly unprepared for a world in which those whom they had for centuries perceived as their inferiors and confined to the bottom of the social system now bore arms and refused even to pretend to be submissive. Those who had long abased Jews as dhimmis could not comprehend how Israel won decisive military victories over combined Arab armies and established a flourishing Jewish state.

Eunice G. Pollack (PhD Columbia University), is a Professor of History and Jewish Studies, ret., University of North Texas. Her most recent publication is *Black Antisemitism in America: Past and Present* (Institute for National Security Studies, 2022).

Stephen H. Norwood (PhD Columbia University), is a Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of six books, most recently *Prologue to Annihilation: Ordinary American and British Jews Challenge the Third Reich* (2021).



