

Isaac: Viorst's "Zionism" is a "Sloppy Hit on Israel"



Israeli PM Netanyahu in Likud meeting at Begin Heritage Center, Jerusalem, March 16, 2016

There has not been a serious critical review of [Milton Viorst's, *Zionism: The Birth and Transformation of an Ideal*](#), until David Isaac published, "[A Sloppy Hit on Israel](#)" in today's *Washington Free Beacon*. Isaac is the creative force behind the history of Zionism educational documentary website, [Zionism 101.org](#). See our Iconoclast post on a previous review by Isaac: "[Why are Jews Against Israel.](#)"

Viorst has been the Middle East commentator of record for *The New Yorker* since the early 1980's. He is not an admirer of Revisionist Zionist founder Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Moreover, he believes the 40 years, since the election of Likud government beginning with Menachem Begin culminating in the several governments of current Israeli PM Netanyahu, have suborned the original objectives of the historic figures of Zionism beginning with the founder of political Zionism, Theodore Herzl. In successive chapters Viorst opines on those involved

with the establishment of the modern State of Israel: Chaim Weizmann, David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir and the tragic Yitzhak Rabin

The value of Isaac's review is he reveals the historical inaccuracies and myopic delusions of Viorst. Viorst contends that only lotus eating peaceniks preaching accommodation of Palestinian demands are true Zionists. He even lambasts current Labor party leaders for reflecting the realities of peace processes that have failed to deliver security. If anything it has been Israeli diplomacy under successive Likud governments, backed by military, technological prowess and removal of state ownership of enterprises that enabled the Jewish nation to flourish in the 21st Century.

JP O'Malley in his *Times of Israel* review on July 7, 2016 gives us the tachlis (bottom line in Hebrew) of Viorst polemic: "the 40-year-old Jabotinsky resurgence is responsible for marginalizing peace talks, historian Milton Viorst claims in his newest book." O'Malley notes:

"The main theme of my book," Viorst explains, "is how we – and I say we, because I regard myself as a Zionist – have gone from Herzl, who thought of a Jewish homeland, a refuge for a beleaguered people, to gradually over the decades becoming a military power where peace and security was thought about exclusively within a military framework."

"Israel has really gone off on the wrong direction," says Viorst.

In recent years, Viorst argues, though Israel has grown stronger as a nation and prospered, Zionism has become increasingly defined by military power.

"Clearly," Viorst explains, "peace has not in any scientific or biological way disappeared from the Jewish

DNA. But peace sure as hell seems to have disappeared from [Jews'] cultural DNA.”

“This cultural shift to a more militant view of Zionism has not been as prominent with Jews in the United States,” Viorst maintains.

For more read: [“Seeing Begin as the End of Traditional Zionism,”](#) *Times of Israel*:

Isaac in his *Washington Free Beacon* review, parts company with Viorst’s myopic view of Zionism, Jewish sovereignty and Israeli history:

At the heart of this book is the assumption that Israel is wholly to blame for the conflict between Jews and Arabs.

Though himself a Jew, Viorst veers into racist-sounding rhetoric when he asks whether “the Jewish DNA contains immunity to peace.” Given Israel’s many attempts to achieve peace, the question isn’t whether Jews are immune to peace but whether they are immune to reality. Viorst clearly is. Otherwise he could not declare that Israel adheres to the “Begin doctrine,” a “diplomatic principle” that purportedly maintains that if a small state “offers concessions at a time of pressure, it only invites more pressure upon itself”

Isaac points out Viorst’s myopia:

Viorst examines the lives of eight Zionist leaders, from Herzl to Netanyahu, to answer his own question: “How did Zionism, over the course of a century, evolve from the idealism of providing refuge for beleaguered Jews to a rationalization for the army’s occupation of powerless Palestinians?” This question is based on a false premise. Israel’s purpose was and remains what Herzl set forth in *The Jewish State*: “We shall live at last as free men on

our own soil, and die peacefully in our own homes.” Zionism has not a glimmer of oppression in it, which explains the Jews’ many efforts to find a solution to the conflict. Those whom Viorst calls “powerless Palestinians” enjoy the support of all Muslim countries, as well as Europe, the U.N., and the world media. Many of them are determined to annihilate Israel, indoctrinating violence in their young people, who then go out and slaughter children in their sleep, gun down families on the road, and ax rabbis at prayer. Those who commit these crimes are hailed as martyrs, and their families are given stipends. When Palestinians hear of a successful attack against Israelis—or Americans for that matter, as on 9/11—they hand out candy to children. A far better question Viorst might have asked is: How is it that the Jews have managed to keep their humanity in the face of such inhumanity?

On the matter of clearing the misinformation on Jabotinsky’s legacy:

Viorst blames Zionism’s supposed moral descent to the rise of the Revisionist movement led by Vladimir Jabotinsky in the 1920s and ‘30s. “Revisionism thrives today, with an ideology that has grown only harsher since Jabotinsky’s time,” he writes. This is a bizarre statement: nobody is walking around Israel today calling himself a Revisionist. Revisionism was of a specific time and place, its name referring to the need to *revise* Zionist policy toward Britain during the period of the Mandate. The most one can say is that there are still followers of Jabotinsky, those who admire his highly original writings and warmth of character. Unlike David Ben-Gurion or Chaim Weizmann, Jabotinsky showed a sincere interest in the masses of Jewry.

Isaac points out Viorst’s historical errors:

The book is riddled with basic factual errors, large and

small. In the latter category, Viorst describes Jabotinsky's *The Five* as an "early novel" when in fact Jabotinsky wrote it five years before his death. Viorst repeats tales of old calumnies like that of Deir Yassin, an Arab village attacked by Irgun forces during the War of Independence. He describes it as a massacre of Arab women and children who put up little resistance, when in fact the Irgun suffered 41 casualties, as both residents and foreign fighters opened fire. He claims repeatedly that Betar, a youth group led by Jabotinsky, organized a demonstration at the Western Wall that provoked the 1929 Arab riots. Only it wasn't a Betar protest. Even the British officer who negotiated with the protesters said they weren't Betar members.

The list of errors goes on: Viorst states that the Haganah turned in members of the underground group Lehi to the British during the *Saison*, when in fact the Haganah turned in only Irgun members. (If Lehi members were captured, it was by accident.) He wrongly states that Jewish military units were formed too late to fight in World War II when, in fact, they fought the Germans in Italy. He asserts that America opened its arsenal to Israel in 1948 when it did the opposite, imposing an embargo on arms to the region. The embargo had no effect on the Arabs, who received weapons from the British, but had a profoundly detrimental effect on Israel.

Isaac concludes his review:

These exaggerations, errors, and smears grow out of Viorst's seemingly pathological need to find fault with the Zionists for their every action, and indeed for the actions of others. This need goes so far that, when writing about Hamas bombardment of Israeli population centers with rockets, Viorst finds a way to point a finger at the Jews, saying that the rockets served "to remind Israel and the world that a million and a half Gazans

could not tolerate living under the deplorable conditions that Israel imposed on them.”

Viorst dedicates his book to the late Rabbi Leonard Beerman (who also assailed Israel) “and the other peacemakers, the greatest of the Zionists.” Here one gets the sense that Viorst is paying tribute to himself. If you’re looking for a book riddled with errors written by a man whose assumptions are all wrong and who marinates in his own moral virtue, then *Zionism* by Milton Viorst should rise to the top of your summer reading list.

Kol hakavod to David Isaac for bringing a dose of reality to the dangerous myopia behind a bizarre history of Zionism interpreted by Milton Viorst