Meet the New York Times' New Jerusalem Bureau Chief

by Hugh Fitzgerald

He's only 31, but hey, who's counting? The news about the latest New York Times expert on the Middle East, by Ira Stoll, is here: "Newly Appointed New York Times Jerusalem Bureau Chief Has History of Mistakes in Israel Coverage," by Ira Stoll, Algemeiner, October 29, 2020:

> ***The New York Times' next Jerusalem bureau chief will be a 31-year-old whose previous articles about Israel have been riddled with mistakes.***
>
> *The Times announced the appointment of the new correspondent, Patrick Kingsley, on Thursday. It did so in a memo that, in classic Times bureaucratic cluster style, was signed by not*

> *one, not two but five Times middle managers: assistant managing editor for international Michael Slackman, Europe editor Jim Yardley, Middle East editor Herbert Buchsbaum, senior news editor for international Marjorie Olster, and international managing editor Greg Winter.*
>
> ***The Times memo reported that Kingsley "recently discovered that he has several long-lost relatives in Israel, via a mutual ancestor in Lithuania. A reunion is planned." Kingsley didn't respond to a query from The Algemeiner asking whether he is Jewish.***

Kingsley's "discovery" that he has long-lost Jewish relatives in Israel is clearly apotropaic: it's to ward off the evil of Jews who will be unhappy with his coverage of the Middle East; he figures that as long as he is a bit Jewish, he trusts he will be exempt – never mind how ill-informed his reports from Jerusalem may be – from criticism. Psychologists call this the Beinart delusion.

> ***Kingsley has some Israel experience already, but it's not at all encouraging. A March 2020 article he wrote from Israel for the Times carried a whopper of a correction: "An earlier version of this article referred incorrectly to the number of Israelis who are of Arab ethnicity. It is about one in five, not two in five.*** *The article also misstated Arab turnout in Israeli elections. Turnout fell below 50 percent in the April election, but it is not the case that turnout has been below that level historically." Left uncorrected in the article was the claim that President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu's Middle East peace plan "would annex large tracts of Palestinian land." As I {Ira Stoll] wrote then, "It's not accurate for the Times to describe it as 'Palestinian land.'*

Apparently believing that 40% of Israel's population consists of Arabs, Patrick Kingsley has some 'splainin to do for a mistake of this magnitude. Could it be that he subliminally

thinks, wants, hopes, predicts that Israel is or soon will be "almost half-Arab"? Was it just an innocent, if gross, error, or is it explicable as an oblique hint of a subliminal anti-Israel parti pris?

> *Usually they call it the West Bank, or, sometimes, Israeli-occupied territory. Some Israelis refer to it as Judea and Samaria. Whether it is or isn't Palestinian land is what the Israelis and Palestinians have been intermittently negotiating about or fighting about for decades. To call it Palestinian land is to take one side — the Palestinian one — in that dispute."*

It will be fascinating to see if Patrick Kingsley continues, in his reporting from Israel, to refer to the "West Bank" as "Palestinian land." Surely he knows by now that it is precisely that land that is in dispute between the PA and Israel? Between Hamas and Israel, the dispute is over not only the "West Bank," but about all of Israel — over the very existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Will Kingsley do what no previous Times correspondent in Israel has done, and carefully study the text of the Mandate for Palestine, and the maps that include the territory which was intended, under the Mandate, to be included in the future Jewish National Home? If he does he will discover that the "West Bank" was always meant to be part of the Jewish state; that state was to have included all the land from the Golan Heights in the north to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean in the west.

Kingsley will also discover, if he does a little reading in preparation for taking up his post, that when Jordan's Arab Legion seized the "West Bank" in 1949, and held it until June 1967, it did not acquire legal title to the area; only two countries — the U.K. and Pakistan — regarded Jordan as anything other than a "military occupier." Israel had retained the legal title to the area, derived from the Mandate for

Palestine, but was able to exercise its claim to the "West Bank" only when it took possession of the area during the Six-Day War.

As for those "settlements" in the West Bank that we are so often told violate "international law," those settlements are not only allowed under the Palestine Mandate, but were to be deliberately encouraged by the Mandatory, Great Britain. Article 6 of the Mandate calls for Great Britain to "facilitate Jewish immigration" and to encourage "close settlement by Jews on the land." What land? All the land from the Golan to the Red Sea, and from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean.

Article 80 of the U.N. Charter (which used to be called the "Jewish people's article") implicitly recognizes the continuing relevance of the Palestine Mandate. It reads: "Except as may be agreed upon in individual trusteeship arrangements placing each territory under the trusteeship system, nothing in this chapter should be construed in and of itself to alter in any manner the rights of any state or any peoples in any territory." In other words, the Mandate for Palestine's provisions had not changed; the commitments made to the Jews were still valid even if the League of Nations no longer existed; the Jewish state could legitimately claim the territory originally assigned to it under the Mandate.

Another aspect of the Arab-Israel conflict that Patrick Kingsley might want to look into is when, and why, the Jordanians renamed the territory they seized in the 1948 war. What had always been known in the Western world for more than two thousand years, as "Judea" and "Samaria" was now renamed in 1950 as "the West Bank." Thus were the venerable Biblical place names (used by, among others, Jesus) which the Jordanians rejected as "too Jewish," tossed aside, and the world soon became so accustomed to the toponym "West Bank." Outside of Israel, when some of us try to undo that Jordanian maneuver from 1950, and use the terms "Judea" and "Samaria,"

we do so in a slightly embarrassed manner, knowing others will take us for wild-eyed Jewish settlers. The only way to recover the ancient and true toponyms is to repeatedly use them, so that they recover their former, pre-1950 familiarity in the geographies of our minds. Perhaps Patrick Kingsley would like to tackle the subject of how and why the "West Bank" came to be. He can even give his piece a scholarly resonance by informing readers of how the Romans, for the same dejudaizing reason as the Jordanians, changed "Judea" to "Palestine" (which stuck) and "Jerusalem" to "Aelia Capitolina" (which didn't).

> ***An April 2019 front-page Times article by Kingsley about antisemitism was full of inaccuracies, including the false assertion that "For decades after World War II and the Holocaust, anti-Semitism was mostly consigned to the political fringes.".***

Is Kingsley correct? Was antisemitism "mostly consigned to the political fringe" for decades after World War II?

Alas, no.

In France in the mid-1950s, Pierre Poujade led a strong political movement that, at its height, in 1955, had 400,000 members; antisemitism was a major part of its anti-establishment appeal.

In the Soviet Union, by the late 1940s, the government of Joseph Stalin began to persecute, and murder, Jews for being "Zionists" and "cosmopolitans." They were falsely accused of espionage and treason as well as other crimes. On August 12, 1952, thirteen prominent Jewish intellectuals, including five Yiddish writers, were executed in the KGB's headquarters at Lubyanka Prison in Moscow. They had first been arrested between September 1948 and June 1949. All the defendants had been tortured, beaten, and isolated for three years before being formally charged. Soon after, at the end of 1952, the

Soviet regime hatched the “Doctors’ Plot,” a made-up conspiracy in which Jewish doctors were accused of planning to kill Soviet leaders. They were imprisoned, tortured, and would have been executed, had Stalin not died suddenly in March 1953. Don’t those murders of Jews — the intellectuals and then the doctors — count as antisemitism?

In 1945, Ernest Bevin was the Foreign Secretary in the British Labour government headed by Clement Attlee. Bevin sent the Jews aboard the ship Exodus, trying to make it to Palestine, back to Germany. Bevin remarked that Jewish survivors of Europe were “pushing to the front of the queue” — as if they hadn’t suffered far more than any others — and during the 1947 fuel crisis he made a joke about “Israelites,” implying that the money-grubbing Jews were involved in the black market. His most infamous comment was that the people of America had insisted that 100,000 Jews be admitted to Palestine “because they do not want too many of them in New York.” How’s that for antisemitism at the highest rungs of power in the U.K.?

In Argentina, many Nazis found refuge and a sympathetic climate of antisemitism in the 1940s and 1950s. Though Juan Peron was not himself antisemitic, some of the officials in his government approved of this rescue of some of the worst Nazis, including Adolf Eichmann, who was undisturbed in his house on Garibaldi Street until the Mossad came calling.

In Spain, Francisco Franco permitted Nazis to live freely in the country, frequently made antisemitic remarks himself, and allowed masses to be said in Hitler’s memory. Antisemites, including Nazi war criminals such as Otto Skorzeny, were safe, and prospered, in Fascist Spain after the war. Antisemitism, wouldn’t you say?

In Eastern Europe, antisemitism did not disappear “for decades” after the war. In Kielce, on July 4, 1946, Polish police, soldiers, and civilians killed 42 Jews in a pogrom. This led most of the Jews remaining in Poland to leave the

country. Jews who tried to reclaim their homes were met with force by those who had taken over their property, and the Jews were forced to flee for their very lives. I'd call that antisemitism. Patrick, what about you?

In Czechoslovakia, the trial of Rudolf Slánský and 13 others was an antisemitic show trial; ten of the fourteen accused were Jews. Confessions of being "Zionists" and "Western spies" were obtained under torture; 11 were promptly executed, and three given life sentences. All were completely innocent. I detect more than a whiff of antisemitiasm.

The Slánský trial had been proceeded by the 1949 trial of Hungarian communist László Rajk and his co-defendants, the first show trial where victims were accused of organizing a "worldwide Zionist conspiracy." Although Rajk was not Jewish, six of the other defendants were.

Aside from the Slánský and Rajk trials, there were antisemitic purges throughout the 1940s and early 1950s in East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Perhaps now Kingsley will want to rethink his claim that after World War II, antisemitism was "mostly confined to the political fringe."

So what could Patrick Kingsley learn from all the above? The following:

1. The West Bank is not "Palestinian land."
2. All the territory from the Golan Heights in the north to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Jordan River in the east, to the Mediterranean in the west, belongs by right to Israel. See the Mandate for Palestine.
3. As Mandatory, Great Britain was required to "facilitate Jewish immigration" to Mandatory Palestine and to encourage "close settlement by Jews on the land." See Article 6 of the Mandate for Palestine.
4. In 1950 Jordan chose to designate the territory formerly

known for 2000 years in the Western world as “Judea” and “Samaria” with a new place name devoid of Jewish associations: the “West Bank.” This was akin to what the Romans had done in changing “Judea” to “Palestine” and “Jerusalem” to Aelia Capitolina.”

5. After World War II, antisemitism was not, alas, confined “for decades” to “fringe” groups as Kingsley believes. It remained a potent force in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, South America, Spain, in some political movements in France, and even in the U.K. cabinet.

Poor Patrick Kingsley. So much to learn, so little time.

First published in