

Nicole LaCour Young  
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*An evaluation of*

America and the Founding of Israel,

**An Investigation of the Morality of America's role**

John W. Mulhull (1995)

The issues involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are complex. The history behind the conflict is complicated and goes back to ancient times. Many people have written books about various aspects of this issue from many different perspectives. The title of John W. Mulhull's book, America and the Founding of Israel, An Investigation of the Morality of America's role, suggests that he has written this book with a narrow focus on the issue, one that is not often explored by the mainstream media of the United States (U.S.). I was intrigued by the title of this and looked forward to reading an intense discussion about the moral issues surrounding America's involvement in Israel. In actuality, the book does not offer an intense investigation solely into America's role. What it does provide is a history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, beginning with the ancient civilizations of the area and up to the events immediately following the founding of the state of Israel and the war of 1947-48. It is clear that this book is not the result of an attempt to answer an open-ended question. The book is instead, evidence to support an opinion already concluded by the author. Mulhull viewed the actions of the Zionist movement<sup>1</sup>, a group of Jewish people whose goal was to form a Jewish state in Palestine, the British government, and the American government as immoral. He presents his evidence in this book. America's role does not dominate the discussion. At best, Mulhull makes a compelling case that the United States is guilty of being an accomplice to unjust policies and actions of the British government and the Zionist movement. The text of this book could just as easily support the title, *How the British Imperialistic Bastards Screwed the Palestinian Arabs and How America Helped*. I'm not sure Mulhull would agree, being a Catholic priest.

Where Mulhull makes his case for the immorality of America's policies towards Palestine, he does so with his discussion of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the immigration of Jewish people into Palestine, the refugee problems of displaced Jewish people through two world wars,

the UN partition plan of 1947, and the founding of the Israeli state. The first three chapters of the book cover more fundamental issues, essential to an understanding of any aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I commend Mulhull for addressing these issues because they are relevant to the discussion. Before I evaluate Mulhull's moral judgments on America I will evaluate his treatment of these basic issues.

Before he ever addresses America's role Mulhull begins his discussion by first asking fundamental questions about the moral rights of Jewish people to claim the land of Palestine as their own. He begins with the Bible. Through an excruciating set of arguments he easily concludes that the Bible, which contains promises by God to the Hebrews that they will inherit the land of Canaan<sup>2</sup>, cannot be seen as justification for a moral right to claim the land of Palestine. Mulhull easily makes his point by illustrating that most moderate biblical historians and scholars find many flaws in the historical accuracy of the Bible. Only Jewish literalists can claim the Bible as proof of their right to claim the land. What Mulhull ignores is that this argument is moot. Whether or not the Bible is historically accurate, most Jewish people believe in its stories as part of their historical, religious and cultural heritage. Jewish people consider the land of Palestine *holy*, as do Muslims and Christians. The connection between the land and the people is strong and can never be logically argued away. [Feiler, 2002]

Mulhull next explores whether the Jews or the Arabs have a greater hereditary right to the land. He concludes that neither has the greater right and refutes Zionists claim to a greater hereditary right. Zionists contend that the Jewish people have inhabited the land of Palestine or Canaan since ancient times. Mulhull concludes that whatever hereditary rights the Jewish people have to Palestine, the Arabs have the same rights and one's does not outweigh the other's.

Neither claim can be proven or refuted by science. Both can credibly claim that they are either descendants of, or assimilated into, the indigenous population of Canaan. [Tubb, 1998]

What Mulhull doesn't ask is why it was never a possibility that both groups could live in Palestine together peacefully, as a bi-national state, after the defeat of the Turkish-Ottoman Empire by the Allies in World War I. Mulhull includes Biblical stories regarding God's continued promises of the land of Canaan to Abraham, Moses and others. He does not spend any time on the story of Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Understanding Isaac and Ishmael helps to understand the inherent distrust, competition and tension which has always existed between the Jews and the Arabs of Palestine. According to the Bible, Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael is the result of his relations with a maidservant, Hagar. Isaac, his second son is born to his wife Sarah. God tells Abraham that he will continue his covenant with Isaac and Isaac will be the father of the nation of Israel. God makes the promise that Ishmael will also be the father of a great nation, since he is of the seed of Abraham. Both settle in the land of Canaan, hence the problem. To many Jewish people, literalists or not, Isaac and Abraham are patriarchs. This connection is very real to them. Likewise, Arabs see Ishmael as their ancestor and Abraham as their patriarch. They, too have a real connection to these stories. Both nations rely on these stories as a source of identity. The two have been in competition with each other, as they see it, since Biblical times. [Feiler, 2002]

Mulhull finally introduces America into the picture in chapter four with his discussion of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The Balfour Declaration, named after the British foreign minister who supported it, is a statement which proclaims Britain's support of the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine with the condition that the religious and civil rights of its inhabitants not be endangered. The reasons for the declaration are complex and detailed

thoroughly in Mulhull's book. The declaration was the result of Zionist pressure and intense campaigning for their goal of a Jewish national home and British hopes of gaining support of Jewish people around the world and especially in America, for the Allied cause in World War I. Mulhull makes a strong case against the morality of the British government by cataloging promises made and broken to the Arabs living under Turkish-Ottoman control at the time. However, throughout the book he seems to be more morally outraged by America's role in these matters than by the British role. Mulhull's first judgment of immorality is given over Woodrow Wilson's approval of the Balfour declaration and the British mandate over Palestine, which resulted from negotiations made at the end of World War I. He correctly points out the hypocrisy of Wilson's approval in the light of his proclaimed Fourteen Points<sup>3</sup>. Wilson gained popularity around the world and encouraged the hope of many nations when he advocated the end of colonialist practices and the rights of all people to self-determination. The Arabs of Palestine were among those who began to hope for independence. Balfour diminished those hopes. Britain kept her promises of independence to many Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen, but wanting control over the Suez Canal obtained control of Palestine.

A major theme that runs through Mulhull's book is that of Zionist influence over policies of Britain, America and later the United Nations (UN). He repeatedly questions the morality of the influence itself and of the leaders of America and Britain in succumbing to that pressure. He is especially harsh on Harry S. Truman but proclaims judgments of immorality on Wilson, Harding, Coolidge and Roosevelt as well. In some cases these individuals merely continued support of policies already in place. It is their inaction that provides the basis for Mulhull's judgements of immorality. His expectations of American policy makers are high. Perhaps he is right to have such high expectations. His book encourages its readers to place a high moral bar

for their leaders to reach, and to expect that morality, objective morality<sup>4</sup>, as he calls it, will have some place in the policy decisions and actions of those leaders.

Several chapters of the book cover various immigration issues. Mulhull questions the Jewish people's right to immigrate into Palestine, especially after 1800. He concedes that every citizen of the world should have the right to immigrate to any country in the world. However, he argues that those rights are conditioned by the immigrants' impact on the rights of the native inhabitants of a country. When the native population's ability for self-determination is jeopardized by the incoming immigration, then the right to immigrate is questionable.

Mulhull gives numerous examples of how the Zionist movement, through influence over individuals and a cohesive and massive public campaign, manipulated immigration policies of the British in Palestine. During and after the two world wars, many Jewish people became refugees, as did a great number of non-Jewish people. Some were escaping anti-Semitism, others the fate of Nazi concentration camps. Many were either survivors of those camps or refugees from countries where their lives were in danger, places they feared to return. The world's leaders including President Roosevelt, made many attempts to address the problems of these refugees. At times the attempts and policies were particularly hypocritical. The U.S. did not increase its own immigration quotas to allow more refugees in, partially because of intense isolationism in the U.S. The U.S. instead lobbied for greater Jewish immigration into Palestine, ignoring the rights of the majority of inhabitants already living there. Zionists often played a major role in influencing these policies. Jewish people, specifically in America form a powerful constituency for politicians. This is one reason why their lobbying efforts have been and continue to be so effective. Mulhull judges the succumbing to the pressures of this constituency over the moral rights of the Arab citizens of Palestine as morally wrong. The Arabs of Palestine were without

the same influence because they did not have a cohesive, powerful lobbying movement. Mulhull details many instances in which other locations for either temporary settlement of Jewish refugees or the establishment of a Jewish homeland were considered by world leaders. Over and over again he shows that Zionists blocked the consideration of any other country than Palestine as a possible place for Jewish immigration, despite the circumstances. Zionists viewed alternate locations of Jewish settlement as a hindrance to the goal of Jewish statehood in Palestine. Mulhull judges this influence as highly immoral and claims that these Zionists placed their long term political goals over the short term needs of refugees whose lives were in danger or who were living in appalling conditions in refugee camps. He makes the connection to American immorality with many instances in which the Zionist lobby influenced American policy or American politicians, who supported by either word or deed Zionist goals.

The horrible, inhuman tragedy that was the Holocaust had a profound effect on all of these issues. For the Jews, it left them with the collective belief that the world had let them down, that they could no longer rely on the rest of the world to help them when they needed it, that the only way to survive and flourish was to establish their own state where they could rule themselves and defend themselves from any future oppression. For the non-Jewish world, the realities of the Nazi campaign against many people and especially Jewish people, left them with a collective sense of guilt and tremendous sympathy for Jewish people. This increased the world's support of the Zionist movement and greatly diminished any hope of support for the Palestinian Arabs.

By 1947 tensions between the Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine had erupted in violence from both sides, against each other and against the British. The British government in Palestine was unable to settle the conflict or arrange for a mutually agreeable solution. Britain requested that the UN take over the problem. The UN formed a special commission to study the

issue. The commission responded with two alternative plans for resolving the conflict in Palestine. One was sponsored by only three countries and was referred to as the minority plan. It proposed a bi-national federation of common citizenship with federal authority over foreign policy, defense, immigration and economic matters. The majority plan called for a political partition of Palestine into two states, with Jerusalem held in a trusteeship under international control.

Mulhull tells a story about UN vote over which plan to implement. He claims that the story has unproven allegations as well as overwhelming evidence, which prevent the allegations from being taken seriously. The allegations presented by Mulhull claim that President Truman, responding to intense political pressure from Zionist, pro-Israel Congressman, and the American public, used the full extent of his office to pressure UN member states to vote in favor of the majority plan and Israeli statehood. Mulhull's story of manipulation includes threats of withdrawal of economic aid, offers of increased economic aid and intense lobbying by Truman, his staff, members of Congress, and former secretaries of state to convince UN member states to vote for partition. The two-thirds majority vote was achieved. Mulhull contends that if not for "America imposing its will on several states beholden to it," [pg. 144] UN Resolution 181 (the partition plan) may not have passed, a highly speculative charge. He uses these events to further his argument of extreme immorality on the part of America. He argues, rightly I believe, that the Arabs of Palestine were outnumbered and outmaneuvered by the lobbying efforts of Zionists. Their voice was not heard and their wishes and desires for their own fate, dismissed or outvoted. By lobbying for the partition plan, Mulhull maintains, America was a party to a great injustice imposed upon the native people of Palestine.

Meanwhile, in Palestine, the Jewish community had already established an armed military. After UN Resolution 181 the Jewish military used its influence and financial means to acquire more arms. What occurred next is truly a grave injustice and Mulhull's presentation of the facts alone attest to the immorality of the acts. He details in Chapters nine and ten the ways in which the Jewish military used extreme violence and intimidation to drive Arabs out of their homes and into neighboring countries as refugees. They then confiscated or destroyed their land and homes. The Israelis, after statehood, refused to allow the Arabs back into the country. They rationalized this policy by claiming that the Arabs abandoned their settlements of their own free will, a claim easily refuted by evidence and numerous eyewitness accounts. The Israelis also used a double standard to rationalize the exclusion of Arabs. They claimed that the Arabs lost their claim to the land when they left it. This logic was not applicable to Jews living outside of Israel even if they had lived there for generations. Zionists claimed that absent Jewish people retained their rights to the land despite the length of time they or their ancestors had lived outside Palestine. Arab refugees forced from their homes were not accorded the same rights.

Israeli statehood was announced on Friday, May 14, 1948, the Zionist goal achieved. Truman soon added his recognition to its legitimacy. Mulhull continues his discussion through the events of 1950 and continues to make a case against Truman along the same lines as the judgments of immorality made before. In many instances his case is solid. Truman continued to endorse Israel, by word and by money, through loans and aid, despite his awareness of the harshness of the Israeli's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs.

What is not covered thus far is Mulhull's treatment of acts of violence, which occurred throughout this history. He does cover it and he writes about violence from both sides of the issue, seemingly objectively and with great detail. However, he seems to use Jewish violence

against Arabs as proof of the immorality of the Jewish people committing the acts, and the Zionist movement itself. Arab violence is portrayed as evidence that the Jews should not have pushed the Arabs to the point that they lacked the ability to exercise their rights of self-determination. Mulhull does not scrutinize the morality of Palestinian Arabs in this book.

In his final arguments, Mulhull compares American policy toward Palestine with the policy of internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. While the internment was the result of the policies of only a few government officials, Americans acknowledged their corporate responsibility for the policy by lobbying for and supporting the payment of reparations to the survivors and descendants of the internment. Mulhull contends that America has the same corporate responsibility towards the Palestinian Arabs and should pay them reparations as well.

In the introduction to the book Mulhull explains his reasons for approaching the subject through a moral perspective. He was the host of a radio program for twenty-five years. On the radio show he discussed pressing moral issues with the American public. He found that Americans, at least those who called in to his show, viewed such issues as human rights, oppression of people around the world, the right to life, and racism as burning moral questions. When it came to America's involvement in Israel, Americans were less likely to see this issue as a moral dilemma. This prompted Mulhull to research the subject extensively and provide his arguments for America's immoral role in the conflict. What resulted is a refreshing and different perspective on the issue, as well as an excellent source of extensive history of the conflict. What is missing from the book is the other side of the story, the Jewish view of Palestinian immorality. What are also missing are the events of 1950 to 1995. Those events may complicate the stand Mulhull has taken in this book. These exclusions call into question Mulhull's objectivity.

Anyone interested in the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian problems would find this book helpful and enlightening, though perhaps not purely objective. I, for one am glad to have read it. The book informed me about events I knew nothing of and forced me to look closer at the role my country's government played in an issue as controversial and important to the world as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> The Zionist movement gained prominence through the Jewish activist, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904). Herzl, an Austrian playwright witnessed the horrors of anti-Semitism in Europe. He came to believe that the only way to escape Jewish persecution was to move to a new homeland, a place where Jewish people could form their own autonomous government, free from any other influence and with the support of the international community. He eventually came to see Palestine as the only proper Jewish homeland. After the first meeting of his newly formed Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland he wrote in his journal, "At Basel, I founded the Jewish state."

<sup>2</sup> Canaan refers to the area now known as Israel (formerly Palestine), Jordan, Lebanon and parts of Syria. [Tubb, 1998]

<sup>3</sup> The Fourteen Points refers to Woodrow Wilson's series of provisions presented to the U.S. Congress in January of 1918 and later to the Allies assembled at the Paris Peace Conference after World War I. Wilson's idealist recommendations included insuring the rights of all people to self-determination, ending imperialistic, colonialist practices and the forming the League of Nations among others. [Brinkley, 2003]

<sup>4</sup> In the introduction of his book Mulhull claims to use moral standards that are universally accepted and transcend culture and religion. He differentiates between objective morality, the rightness or wrongness of an act with subjective morality, the rightness or wrongness of the act as perceived by the individual committing the act. He uses the following question and statements as examples of universal morality and a basis for his objective moral judgments throughout the book: Is it fair?, Do unto others, as you would have them do to you., Help those in need., Do not kill unjustly., and Do not steal.

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