

Harold Weisberg

Bumpkins vs. a know-it-all

He who knows all there is to know about everything, about the law, ranging from local zoning ordinances to international laws on piracy; about all things political, be they local, state, national or international; about the most complicated history and current and past international affairs and conflicts; he who, from the depths of good conscience and gracefulness of spirit, is careful not to refer to us as yokels while making it clear that, save for him, we are all bumpkins; who is the most experienced of world-traveling reporters while never reflecting this in his writings; who limits his not-infrequent name-droppings to contrived casualness, has devoted an extraordinary amount of attention to a subject that is, by any reasonable standard, not a major concern of Fredericktonians.

No, not the unfairness and stupidity of zoning ordinances; not his newsworthy loves, ranging from all children to his one and only Quaker wife. Not Mayor Young or Governor Schaefer. Not the national debt or the budget. The Middle East and Jews.

His wisdom and knowledge are the basis for his writings about Israel and Jews that seem to be the subject of about half of his columns, not counting little snippets. Much of what he says does not exist in standard sources.

Our seer is, by his own straightforward declaration, "moderate" and absolutely incapable of discrimination. Knock him down, bash his head and kick his groin, he simply will not discriminate. He says it, so it is true. What he writes is true because he says it.

There is not an anti-Semitic bone in his body because he supported Steve Sachs. I am, therefore, a Republican because I have always voted for some Republicans, beginning in FDR's day when Alex Abrahams, the first sports editor for whom I worked, ran for mayor. Even though from my first vote I have always been a registered Democrat, I am more Republican than he is not anti-Semitic because he can cite only the Steve Sachs campaign while I cannot begin to remember all the Republicans I supported.

Our master of logic and fact, content in his fenced-in ivory tower, does not lower himself and his lofty standards by responding to factual criticisms, even

questions about his journalistic and personal integrity as reflected in those many jewels he self-sacrificingly casts before us swine. He is, as he has been and I perceive will be, above the fray save in the perceptions of a few of his like-minded friends who see him by his total withdrawal as participating in a "feud."

Unlike most of those on whom he lavishes his wisdom and all-inclusive knowledge, he reads the *Washington Post*, as I have for about 55 years. Recently he quoted Mary McGrory about how wrong Israel is and how wrong Senator Inouye was in sponsoring a since-withdrawn appropriation of \$8 million for schools in France. (This was to preserve the culture of Jewish refugees from centuries of Arab blessings in North Africa. This funding was for the part of the project that, under its law, the French government cannot fund. I oppose spending tax money on any religious projects, no matter how worthy they may appear to be.)

Our guru does not want to waste bashing space so he does not bother his readers with the corrections the *Post* printed. Nor does he confuse simple minds by telling them that our tax money has also gone, for years, to support other religious interests, like the Catholic radio stations in Manila.

He does not report that not a penny of the many millions appropriated for and spent on refugees in the Middle East has gone to succor any of thousands of Jewish refugees, even though this was published in the papers he reads. That would confuse and confound his writing. Nor that Jewish-American tax dollars are and have been supporting countless Arabs. Needy refugees are needy refugees except that, to him, if they are Jewish refugees from the millennia of Arab solicitude, serving any of their needs is wrong — outrageous.

In his rush to judgment and use of space for other purposes, not that he is limited in space — he does have other purposes which ought be obvious even to those who hang on his every word — I fear that, particularly given that we are uninformed countrymen, yokels or bumpkins and because there is what he omits, whatever his reason, many of us may wind up even more ignorant than we were before his unselfish dedication to our enlightenment and, as a result, all

may appear to be black and white.

There is the historical background that not once has he included in his many dispensations of knowledge and wisdom about the Middle East. This, too, would confuse and confound his writing. Gaza, for example. How many times has he flogged it to say only that Israel is murdering Arabs there and suppressing news from there. Israel suppression explains why we see it nightly on all TV news.

About Gaza itself he has said nothing. Not even that Samson had his eyes put out there. Not how it came to be that Israel is in Gaza when it doesn't want Gaza. Not who was there before Israel and with what consequences. Not whether the people in Gaza are better off in creature comforts or opportunities or civil and legal rights than before, which is true, much as many of them have made clear that they want a change. Not how all the weeks of violence started or who started it and why. Not that as soon as cameras and reporters are seen the kids riot to make the news. Not what Israel's responsibilities are under international law, the law on which he has represented himself as expert. Not even what blares from the public address system of the mosques, endless calls of "Kill the Jews!"

I oppose violence in any form and have a record going back to what was then known as "the Oxford pledge," when I opposed compulsory military training in colleges. Notwithstanding this record, I was not a conscientious objector in World War II and enlisted as a private. That was because I also opposed the world's most terrible practitioner of violence whose victims outnumbered those even of Genghis Khan. I sorrow no less than he over the suffering in Gaza and elsewhere, as do most Israelis. Including the military, from generals down, whose lamentations are published here despite that "censorship" and "suppression" of which he writes.

I don't know about him, but I contribute to funds for the needy and oppressed on four continents and some help Muslims.

Forced deportations are terrible. Israel announced it was deporting nine young men as terrorists. Is this unique? Ought his readers know?

Babies are being killed and have been killed and one need not be the charmer Father Carl Reggio will never forget to believe it is terrible to kill babies. But are babies being killed only now and are they only Arab babies? Or have Muslims also killed babies and have they also forced deportations, not of nine but of hundreds of thousands? Ought his readers be told?

Our eminent scholar has held forth at great length about some 40 Arabs being killed by Israeli troops whose mission it is to restore tranquility in Gaza and protect all living there. I believe that any killing is terrible. Ought his readers know that recently Arabs have killed and are killing more Arabs than this 40?

Then there are the rights and freedoms he says Israel denies Arabs. Are Arabs presently under Israeli jurisdiction less free than they were, less free than Arabs in supposedly free Arab countries that are actually dictatorships? Are they better or worse off under Israel than they had been under Egypt? (The UN says better.) Yes, they were under Egypt but he didn't have space for both that and his cudgel.

I do not and cannot claim his scholarship, his personal experiences among the Arabs he loves, and I can't even claim to have kept Walter Cronkite from being an ignoramus. I am not a scholar of that era although during the time it took the very few Israelis to beat the combined power of the entire Muslim world, all of which ganged up on it when it and the UN declared its freedom, I did report that war on radio. But I do have an interest, perhaps an interest greater than that of most of my fellow citizens, in that area and have read much about it in recent years. I also read *The Washington Post* and sometimes see other papers like *The Sun* and *The New York Times*, and some of our magazines.

So, while it may seem presumptuous because I can't make the claims he never fails to make about omniscience and wisdom, there is more than black and white. There is a background that is inseparable from the present. There is other fact, and as all life is complicated, life there more so, I next begin to round out the picture and provide a dimension to what he portrays as only flat.

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