

Obama's Role Model to Journalists — Dorothy Thompson — Turned against Zionism and Was Silenced

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Many readers will find President Obama's toast to the press at the end of Saturday night's White House Correspondents Association dinner encouraging. He reminded journalists of their actual mission:

"In the words of the American foreign correspondent Dorothy Thompson: 'It is not the fact of liberty but the way in which liberty is exercised that ultimately determines whether liberty itself survives.'"

There's a supreme irony in Obama quoting Thompson, whose truly stellar career ended in charges of antisemitism from Zionists, to a crowd of journalists who quake in fear of having their careers destroyed by Israel supporters who more recently smeared [Helen Thomas](#), [Rick Sanchez](#), [Octavia Nasr](#), and [Jim Clancy](#) for off-hand, ill-conceived remarks.

Thompson's long life and career was documented in her biography, [American Cassandra](#), by Peter Kurth. She was born in 1893, the daughter of an impoverished Methodist preacher. After graduating from Syracuse University, she became a major player in New York's suffrage movement as an organizer and speaker. In 1920, Thompson went to Europe with a friend to pursue her journalism career. The ship was filled with Zionists heading to a conference in London and during the 12-day voyage she learned everything she could about Zionism, becoming a strong advocate for their cause.

In London, she convinced a paper to allow her to cover the Zionist conference as a freelance journalist and later covered the Irish Rebellion. The popularity of her articles in the US led to further positions. By 1925, she was head of the Berlin bureau for the New York Post. She married author Sinclair Lewis in 1928. She exposed and criticized the Nazis early on, and, in 1930, was one of the first journalists to interview Adolph Hitler. She predicted the Germans would start a new war by the end of that decade. In 1934, her aggressive anti-Nazi reporting caused Hitler to expel her from Germany.

Thompson returned home a national hero, her story on the cover of newspapers and magazines throughout the country. Her fame increased as she became a syndicated national columnist and radio commentator for NBC. By 1936, she was writing a political column for the *New York Herald Tribune* and was considered the leading voice in the war against fascism. By 1939, she was on the cover of *Time* magazine. A movie about her life starred Katharine Hepburn and a play starred Lauren Bacall. She was named the second most popular and influential woman in America behind Eleanor Roosevelt. She spoke out

about anti-Semitism and the plight of the Jews in Europe, and urged a relaxation of immigration restrictions so the US could be a safe haven for the Jews under threat in Europe.

In the summer of 1941, she went to London to report on the Blitz and met with the Queen and with Prime Minister Winston Churchill. She fought against isolationism and urged the president to declare war on Germany. In 1942, at a Zionist convention at the Biltmore hotel, she was the keynote speaker and gave a rousing pro-Zionist speech advocating unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. By the end of the war, she was considered one of Zionism's most effective spokesmen.

All that changed early in 1945 after a fact-finding trip to Palestine. Up until 1945, her anti-Nazi and pro-Zionist credentials were impeccable. What she saw in Palestine totally changed her outlook. She began to write that the proposed establishment of the State of Israel was a formula for disaster, "a recipe for perpetual war" in the Middle East. During her 1945 trip, she discovered that Zionism was not "the liberal crusade that the Zionist leaders envisaged", and that Israel was to be "not a small state of Jews who chose to live in Israel, but a Zionist state destined to become the leading power in the Middle East."

Her anti-Zionist statements and reporting began losing her the support of American Zionists. Her boss at the New York Post dropped her "On the Record" column at the beginning of 1947. He was a strong supporter of Zionism and very close to the Irgunists and Menachem Begin, the leader of this Jewish terrorist group. Thompson had told him, after her trip to Palestine, that "...the situation there is *not* the way it has been presented by many of the Zionists. It is one of the most complicated and difficult problems on the earth today."

Despite the loss of this important column, she continued her criticism of Zionist actions in Palestine. She concluded, after the 1948 war, that Zionism was "an aggressive, chauvinist movement" and that the new State of Israel was "an expansionist power." She was angered by Jewish terrorism in Israel and appalled by Menachem Begin and the Irgun being treated as heroes in New York City. She was the first and only American journalist to speak out in defense of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab nations, and was also the first and most prominent American journalist to be smeared with the label of "anti-Semite".

Still, she wouldn't back down. In a 1949 column, she [detailed the problems](#) caused by Israel's aggression toward the Palestinian Arabs and urged the UN to establish specific borders for the State of Israel. Her [1949](#) speech before the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism resonates today:

Miss Thompson expressed alarm at the way, she said, American Jews are being indoctrinated by Zionist propaganda, "with the idea that they exist in this country-as everywhere outside of Israel-on dubious sufferance and that whatever happened in Germany could happen here any minute." She denied that there was any analogy between the outbreak of Nazism in Germany and the danger in this country. In addition to this fear, the speaker said, "there is another tendency equally dangerous as it affects non-Jews, and that is to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism."

Thompson addressed [the group again](#) in 1951, and her comments against the special relationship and about Palestinian discrimination were reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency:

Miss Thompson went on to say that the state of Israel and its relations with the Arab countries “is contributing to an international problem in which Americans as a whole are concerned.” She asserted that peace between the Arab states and Israel was possible “only if the U.S. ceases to treat one state in the Middle East as its particular protection and pet, and adopts more detachment and equality of treatment, and until the displaced Arabs are properly compensated for their losses.”...[She charged] “that discrimination was practiced against the Arab minority population in Israel, Miss Thomson said: “Despite all the claims of the Zionists, the minuscule Arab population, who represent not more than 15 percent of the original indigenous Arab inhabitants, live as second-rate citizens, with serious restrictions on their rights. The fact that Arabs can sit in the Knesset does not give them equal rights as citizens with Jews. And it is these statutes which are responsible for a flow of Arab refugees from Palestine that has never stopped to this day.”

In a long and thoughtful 1950 article published in the [Jewish magazine Commentary](#), Thompson warned American Jews of the dangers of dual loyalty and of “the terrorism of criticism”.

“...there is another tendency equally dangerous as it affects non-Jews, and that is to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. This really amounts to making anti-Semites, by appointment, of everybody who either does not believe in Zionism or criticizes any phase of Zionist and Israeli policy.”

As Thompson began to increase her criticism of Zionist policies, she was shunned by the Jewish community and by many of her life-long Jewish friends who had “turned on her in a gathering tempest of resentment.” Rumors were circulated that she was an alcoholic, and that her husband had been a Nazi sympathizer or even a former member of the Nazi general staff. The Washington Star, which published her “On the Record” columns, censored and refused to publish any more of her columns on Zionism.

Thompson wrote in 1950, “The Zionists would like us to believe that there is no such thing as an Arab”, and that “They have also adapted the attitude that the State of Israel, unlike every other state on earth, is sacrosanct, and outside any criticism whatsoever.” She called Israel, “the 49th state of the Union”, and “the only nation in history to have been canonized at birth.”

Thompson’s editors warned her that in the American press a hostility toward Israel was “almost a definition of professional suicide.” Nonetheless, she would not be intimidated and said, “I refuse to become an anti-Semite by appointment”, and refused “to yield to this type of blackmail.” The campaign against her strengthened and she began to be dropped from other papers. Her once-lucrative speaking career began to dry up because of the organized campaign to label her as an anti-Semite, a label that stuck for the rest of her career.

Dorothy Thompson’s is truly a remarkable story. Her apex was probably 1948 when Claire Booth Luce and others wanted her to run for president. She’d been one of Zionism’s most famous and influential spokesmen. Her defection, in 1949, created great anger in the Jewish/Zionist communities, and in few short years her career was in tatters and her influence largely gone. Today, Dorothy Thompson is virtually unknown and unremembered. This fascinating woman who deserves to be an icon of the feminist movement, is [rarely, if ever](#), mentioned as an important female historical figure.

I suspect there were very few members of the press at the White House Press dinner Saturday night who have any inclination toward investigating and reporting the plight of the Palestinians, or [the pernicious influence of right wing Jewish billionaires](#) on American foreign policy, and now [American presidential candidates](#). President Obama's gratuitous praise of the American press, at least the television version, was largely undeserved. Many are little more than talking heads on "news" networks that offer mostly infotainment and shameless touting of marginal news stories accompanied by frequent and breathless claims of more "breaking news". The entire bunch couldn't fill Dorothy Thompson's left shoe. To suggest that our TV press is focused on preserving our liberty is ludicrous when ratings and advertising revenue are the obvious focus.

One can only wonder why President Obama praised our press corps using a true icon of journalism as an example. Was he trying, indirectly, to make a point, to remind them of a journalistic icon of the past in the hope they would recapture their own courage and return to true investigative journalism? I'd like to think so.

Dorothy Thompson was the first to pay the price of standing up and reporting the excesses of Zionism. If America's journalists truly want liberty to survive, they need to exercise that liberty by practicing their craft with the courage and determination of Dorothy Thompson whose incredible story will be told in the soon-to-be-released documentary, "[The Silencing of Dorothy Thompson](#)".

Gil Maguire is a retired civil rights attorney and writer of both fiction and non-fiction. He lives in Oxnard. His blog, Irish Moses, is named in honor of his father, Robert F. Maguire, who was awarded the Medal of Valor by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in 2004 for "his heroic efforts that helped to rescue tens of thousands of Jews" during 1948-49 after the founding of the State of Israel.

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