

Remembering Edward Said

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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September 25 marked the 10th anniversary of his death. He was much more than Columbia University Professor of English and Comparative Literature.

He was an extraordinary intellectual, a visionary, a global peace advocate, a man of remarkable humanity, and an uncompromising Palestinian human rights champion.

On November 1, 1935, he was born in Jerusalem. In 1947, his family was exiled. In 1991, he was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia.

It's a malignant cancer of the bone marrow and blood. On September 25, 2003, he succumbed at age 67. He did so after a courageous 12 year struggle for life.

Ilan Pappé called his loss "incalculable." His absence seems "incomprehensible," he added.

A year after his death, he asked "(w)hat would have happened if we still had Edward with us. (It) was another terrible year for the values (he) represented and the causes he defended."

"We miss him as the most articulate responder to" global crisis conditions. His absence reflects "a haunting emptiness." He's sorely missed when he's most needed.

Tariq Ali called his spirit "indomitable." Said was his "longstanding friend and comrade," he said.

"With his death, the Palestinian nation has lost its most articulate voice in the Northern hemisphere, a world where, by and large, the continuous suffering of the Palestinians is ignored," he explained.

He described his ordeal as follows:

"Over the last eleven years, (we) had become so used to his illness – the regular hospital stays, the willingness to undergo trials with the latest drugs, the refusal to accept defeat – that (we thought) him (to be) indestructible."

Dr. Kanti Rai treated him. He said there was "no medical explanation for (his 12 year) survival."

Said spoke of him reverentially, saying:

His "redoubtable medical expertise and remarkable humanity" kept him going during his darkest times. There were many, he added.

He described months of “painful treatments, blood transfusions, endless tests, hours and hours of unproductive time spent staring at the ceiling, draining fatigue and infection, inability to do normal work, and thinking, thinking, thinking.”

Those who knew him best called him “irreplaceable.” He’s terribly missed.

Rashid Khalidi is Columbia University Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies.

He called him “a man of vast erudition and learning, of extraordinary versatility and remarkable (interdisciplinary) expertise.”

We’ve lost “one of the most profound, original and influential thinkers of the past half-century (and) a fearless independent voice speaking truth to the entrenched powers that dominate the Middle East,” he said.

On September 30, 2003, Columbia University mourned the passing of its “beloved and esteemed university professor.”

“The world has lost a brilliant and beautiful mind, a big heart, and a courageous fighter,” a statement said.

On September 24, the [Columbia Daily Spectator](#) headlined “At memorial, Said lauded for intellectual courage,” saying:

“Students and academics gathered Monday night to reflect on the life and legacy of Columbia Professor Edward Said on the 10th anniversary of his death.”

“Presenters lauded (his) academic and political accomplishments and spoke of his intelligence, courage, and charm.”

Khalidi called him one of the first intellectuals to “bring the word ‘Palestine’ within the pale.”

He “debate(d) in the arena of American public discourse with people who denied (its) existence.”

Sociology Professor Jonathan Cole called him “the most courageous academic” he ever knew. He highlighted his Palestinian rights advocacy.

Professor Moustafa Bayoumi is a former Said student. He said his legacy won’t ever die.

“We may have lost him 10 years ago, but we must never lose him,” he stressed.

“We will never lose him. That which he represents can never be lost.”

On October 17, Palestinian lawyer/author Raja Shehadeh will deliver the 10th anniversary Said memorial lecture.

He’ll discuss present day Palestinian suffering, occupation harshness, Gaza imprisonment, Kafkaesque matrix of control conditions, and longstanding unfulfilled liberation.

He’ll remember one of Said’s most moving, lyrical texts. “After the Last Sky” is a searing portrait of Palestinian life and identity.

It's a testimony to Palestinians living in exile. "We are more than someone else's object," Said stressed.

Columbia University Professor Joseph Massad is a Said protege. He contributed an essay to ["Waiting for the Barbarians: A Tribute to Edward Said."](#) He said in part:

"In seeing Palestine from the standpoint of Edward Said, it becomes clear that (his) indispensable legacy constitutes a new beginning for the struggle to see and speak about Palestine, to belong to the Palestinian idea, to be a critic of discursive and visual representations of the Palestinian experience."

"It is this legacy from which we can all begin."

After learning of his grave condition, Said wrote a biographical account of his childhood, upbringing and early years. It's titled ["Out of Place, A Memoir."](#)

He called it "a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world." It's "a subjective account of (his life) in the Arab world, his birth, upbringing and formative years."

In America, he attended boarding school. He earned Princeton University BA and MA degrees. He's a Harvard Ph.D.

In 1994, he began "Out of Place" while recovering from multiple early chemotherapy rounds.

He completed his book with considerable help from "superb nurses," he said. They afforded him "unstinting kindness and patience." They spent months caring for him.

He thanked friends and family for contributing their support.

His book recounts his coming of age. It discusses being displaced, an American, a Christian, a Palestinian, an outsider.

It reflects the genesis of an intellectual giant. Said uncompromisingly rejected imperial viciousness. He held back nothing denouncing it.

He courageously championed Palestinian rights. He supported their liberating struggle.

Perhaps no one ever represented them more eloquently, powerfully, convincingly or with greater clarity.

He did so in books, articles, commentaries and frequent lectures. He made hundreds of public appearances.

He became a target of pro-Israeli extremists. They threatened him and his family.

Once they burned his Columbia University office. He remained resolute. They never silenced him. They never could.

Nor did FBI extremism. Agents monitored him for over 30 years. They defend power and privilege. They target peace, equity and justice activists.

Said's great books include "[Orientalism](#)." He explained a longstanding Western misinterpretation of the East.

In "[Culture and Imperialism](#)," he broadened Orientalism's core argument. He discussed complex East/West relationships.

He explained notions of colonizers and the colonized, "the familiar (Europe, West, us) and the strange (the Orient, East, them)."

His writings showed extraordinary scholarly breath and understanding.

They combined intellect, passion and Palestinian advocacy. He championed peace, equity and justice.

He denounced imperial viciousness. Israel's 1967 Six Day War transformed him. It radicalized him.

He began championing Palestinian rights. He became their leading spokesperson. He was that and much more until his death.

In 1999, he advocated a one-state solution, saying:

"The beginning is to develop something entirely missing from both Israeli and Palestinian realities today: the idea and practice of citizenship, not of ethnic or racial community, as the main vehicle of coexistence.

"Palestinian self-determination in a separate state is unworkable."

"The question" now isn't separation. It's "to see whether it is possible for (Jews and Palestinians) to live together as fairly and peacefully as possible."

"What exists now is a disheartening...bloody impasse."

"There is no way for Israel to get rid of Palestinians or for Palestinians to wish Israelis away."

"I see no other way than to begin now to speak about sharing the land that has thrust us together, sharing it in a truly democratic way, with equal rights for each citizen."

Doing so in no way diminishes life and aspirations for either side, he added.

It affirms equal self-determination for Arabs and Jews. They live together in the same land where they once coexisted peacefully.

Neither side deserves "special status at the expense of the other," Said believed.

For millennia, Palestine was (and still is) "multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious," he explained

No "historical justification for homogeneity" or "notions of national or ethnic and religious purity" exist.

"The alternatives are unpleasantly simple: either the war continues" with its unacceptable costs or an equitable solution is achieved.

There's no in between. Oslo betrayed Palestinian rights. Said denounced it powerfully.

His stinging "[Morning After](#)" commentary explained "the fashion-show vulgarities of the White House ceremony, the degrading spectacle of Yasser Arafat thanking everyone for the suspension of most of his people's rights, and the fatuous solemnity of Bill Clinton's performance, like a 20th century Roman emperor shepherding two vassal kings through rituals of reconciliation and obeisance (and) the truly astonishing proportions of the Palestinian capitulation."

Oslo was unconditional Palestinian surrender. Said called it "a Palestinian Versailles.

A better deal could have been had, he said. Palestinian negotiators sold out. They did so for benefits they derived.

They're at it again today. So-called peace talks resumed. They continue. Pro-Israel collaborators represent millions of Palestinians.

They deserve better. They're denied it. Said would denounce the ones betraying them. He did before. He'd have done it again. He'd have done it powerfully and eloquently.

He denounced pre and post-Oslo sellouts. In his last interview, he was drained, weak and dying.

Yet he found it "very difficult to turn (himself) off," he said.

He reflected on his childhood, upbringing, writing, scholarship, involvement with Yasser Arafat, and strong opinions and activism on Palestinian issues.

He exhibited the same power, passion, intellect, virtue, and uncompromising principles.

He described "Sharonian evil," his blind destructiveness, Israeli terrorism and viciousness.

Sharon called his slaughter of Palestinian children one his great successes.

Said railed against the patently dishonest media. It one-sidedly supports Israel. It suppresses alternative views.

It turns a blind eye to Israel's worst crimes. It does so with disturbing regularity. It represents wealth, power and privilege.

It supports wrong over right. It spurns popular interests. It ignores Palestinian suffering.

Said called Palestine an isolated prison. An entire population is being suffocated out of existence, he said.

Israel impoverishes, starves and slaughters Palestinians.

Artillery, tanks, F-16s, helicopter gunships, and banned terror weapons attack defenseless civilians.

Others are assaulted, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, humiliated, and otherwise abused.

For decades, they've endured every imaginable indignity, degradation, and crime against

humanity.

Their crime is praying to the wrong God. It's wanting to live free in peace on their own land in their own country.

Said understood. He explained powerfully, eloquently and brilliantly.

Their only defense is their will and redoubtable spirit, he said.

They're up against Israel's vicious, unrelenting state terror/genocide agenda.

They endure an unending "cycle of violence," Said explained. They face "slow (motion) death."

Israeli "pacification" slaughters them. Survival depends solely on their to live. World leaders turn a blind eye. They do so disgracefully.

Said uncompromisingly supported their rights. He was resolutely anti-war. He denounced Washington's war on terror.

He said America was "hijacked by a small cabal of individuals."

They're "unresponsive to public pressure." They're bipartisan. They display a "gutless false patriotism."

They're waging war on Islam. They disgracefully characterize Muslims as enemies.

They turned America into a police state. They created the obscenity of Guantanamo and other global torture prisons.

Their so-called "just wars" reflect self-righteous sophistry.

Israeli Lobby power, Christian fascists, bankers and war profiteers run America.

Their hostility to Arabs is palpable. It's vicious. It's lawless. They claim to be "on the side of the angels."

They mock democratic values. They violate rule of law principles. They repeat "hypocritical lies." They masquerade as "absolute truth."

They silence dissent. They wage war on freedom. They shame decency, humanity, equity and justice.

They created their own "fantasy world." They run America for their own self-interest. They want the world run the same way.

Said expressed these and related thoughts powerfully, passionately and eloquently.

He ended one commentary saying:

"Jonathan Swift, thou shouldst be living at this hour."

What would he say 10 years later? Things are much worse than when Said passed. He's

sorely missed when he's most needed.

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