

where secular ideas about human history and development have been overtaken by failure and frustration, as well as by an Islamism built out of rote learning and the obliteration of what are perceived to be other, competitive forms of secular knowledge. The gradual disappearance of the extraordinary tradition of Islamic *ijtihad* or personal interpretation has been one of the major cultural disasters of our time, with the result that critical thinking and individual wrestling with the problems of the modern world have all but disappeared.

This is not to say that the cultural world has simply regressed on one side to a belligerent neo-Orientalism and on the other to blanket rejectionism. Last year's United Nations World Summit in Johannesburg, for all its limitations, did in fact reveal a vast area of common global concern that suggests the welcome emergence of a new collective constituency that gives the often facile notion of "one world" a new urgency. In all this, however, we must admit that no one can possibly know the extraordinarily complex unity of our globalized world, despite the reality that the world does have a real interdependence of parts that leaves no genuine opportunity for isolation.

The terrible conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like "America," "The West" or "Islam," and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse, cannot remain as potent as they are, and must be opposed. We still have at our disposal the rational interpretive skills that are the legacy of humanistic education, not as a sentimental piety enjoining us to return to traditional values or the classics but as the

active practice of worldly secular rational discourse. The secular world is the world of history as made by human beings. Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow. But for that kind of wider perception we need time, patient and skeptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction. Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority. Texts have to be read as texts that were produced and live on in the historical realm in all sorts of what I have called worldly ways. But this by no means excludes power, since on the contrary I have tried to show the insinuations, the imbrications of power into even the most recondite of studies.

And lastly, most important, humanism is the only and I would go so far as saying the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history. We are today abetted by the enormously encouraging democratic field of cyberspace, open to all users in ways undreamt of by earlier generations either of tyrants or of orthodoxies. The world-wide protests before the war began in Iraq would not have been possible were it not for the existence of alternative communities all across the world, informed by alternative information, and keenly aware of the environmental, human rights, and libertarian impulses that bind us together in this tiny planet. ■

Edward Said was a Professor at Columbia University, and a contributor to Cockburn and St. Clair's forthcoming book, *The Politics of Anti-Semitism* (AK Press).

## EDWARD SAID—AN APPRECIATION

Editorial—*Daily Star*, Beirut

Edward Said (1935-2003), respected by many but let down by most. There will be much hand-wringing in the next few days as tributes to the late Edward Said flow from admirers and detractors alike. They will note that it is not just the Arab world that has lost an erudite and impassioned advocate; not just his adopted American homeland that has been robbed of a maverick savant; and not just academe that mourns the passing of a brilliant mind. They will declare that humanity as a whole is poorer for his death. They will be right, of course. But they will also be missing the point that he must have died a very disappointed man because while he lived, almost all of them let him down.

Said's seminal 1978 work, *Orientalism*, set the mold that was to shape his career and interests for the rest of his days. The book identified a host of mechanisms through which perceptions of the Arab and Islamic worlds have been warped by generations of Western artists, politicians and scientists. It sparked furious debate

that continues to this day. It was also, however, a collection of excuses for a part of the world that refused to believe in itself as much he did.

As a product of two very different cultures, Said tried mightily to bridge the gaps between them, only to be constantly frustrated by the refusal of both to recognize the merits of the other. The United States remained largely unwilling to acknowledge the legitimate grievances of the Arab world vis-a-vis Israel, or to dilute its support for the Jewish state even when the latter was manifestly acting against its own long-term interests. The Palestinians and their Arab brethren remained betrothed to backward policies and empty rhetoric, undermining the possibility of rehabilitating themselves in America's eyes and so of regaining any part of what they claimed to value above all else.

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This was not Said's failure. He did more than could fairly be expected of any man but was denied by the arrogance and ignorance of others. Thus his efforts to increase Western acceptance for the Palestinian cause were rewarded at one point by Yasser Arafat's banning him from the Occupied Territories because he criticized rampant corruption in the Palestinian Authority. His work to help Americans overcome their misconceptions about the Arab-Israeli conflict earned shameless accusations of anti-Semitism and other vicious attempts at character assassination.

Said's heroic battle with the disease that eventually killed him is lost forever. But his lonely campaign to foment mutual

understanding, a worthy one to which he devoted so much of his life, still needs recruits from all backgrounds. The greatest representatives of the human race are never properly appreciated during their own lifetimes. For all the accolades he has received, Said was no exception. Only when there is a full and fair peace between Arab and Jew in the Middle East will it begin to dawn on most people just how much has been lost with the death of a single individual and how much time has been wasted on the petty claims and counter-claims of decidedly lesser minds. Only then will both of his peoples, East and West, even begin to deserve his legacy. ■

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## A TRIBUTE TO EDWARD SAID

Roger Normand of the Center for Economic & Social Rights

Today we express our deep sadness about the death of Edward Said, and send our love and condolences to his family and friends. His incredible vitality and spirit throughout his long struggle against terminal illness gave us the hope (and perhaps the illusion) that this day would not come so soon.

At the same time, we must not forget to celebrate his extraordinarily rich and productive life. Edward Said was never afraid to explore and express his inner convictions, often against the overwhelming tides of conventional wisdom. His particular genius enabled him to reshape discourses and spawn an entire academic discipline by virtue not only of his qualities of heart and mind, but also and especially the resonance his ideas and sentiments found within each of us. He was that rare individual able to give voice to a universal conscience, to awaken within us a collective yearning for a better world right now, in this particular time and place.

The importance of his life's work cannot be denied even by his avowed political opponents. Consider how Professor Said's crowning academic achievement the publication of *Orientalism* is more relevant today than ever, not as grand theory to discuss in intellectual salons, but as a life-affirming and life-saving prescription for a world on the brink of endless war. With literal-minded religious and political figures seemingly committed to an apocalyptic unfolding of the "Clash of Civilizations" we would do well to remember his central message: that dialogue between cultures and peoples can be either repressive or liberating. He articulated clearly and forcefully the fundamental distinction between an imposed discourse of conqueror to conquered based on an imbalance of military might and a respectful exchange between equals based on shared principles of human rights at the heart of every true civilization.

Professor Said took sides, choosing to fight against oppression in all of its forms. Throughout his long career he fought with insight, erudition, compassion, courage, perseverance, and a stinging wit. Perhaps because his own identity was based on the merging of opposites, West and East, citizen and exile, he chose to defend all humanity, and not just the Palestinian cause as some critics like to suggest. (Who has more brilliantly dissected the flaws of Arafat than Edward Said?). Each of us faces the same matrix of moral choice as he did, and we are thankful to him for showing us an honest and honorable path.

Of his many outstanding writings, one that always remains with me is a short essay called "Decolonizing the Mind." Written in 1994, at time when Professor Said stood virtually alone among Western intellectuals in denouncing the false peace of the "Oslo process," this essay affirms the value of cultivating mental freedom to face the overwhelming crush of sorrow and oppression that blankets our world. In response to the abuse of words, the abuse of concepts, the abuse of politics, and the abuse of people, Said offers us the decolonized mind as an expression of the human rights mind, a mind that recognizes universal principles of common humanity first, before focusing on the myriad differences that can either be understood to enrich all of us together or exploited to divide us from them, me from you.

Edward Said represented the best face of the hero, a public intellectual with unflinching integrity, and we will miss him greatly. But we must celebrate as we mourn, for he is survived by a growing community of family, friends, and strangers inspired by his passionate belief that 'Speaking the truth and fighting for right' is our only real choice, and that neither illness nor death will slow our march towards universal justice. ■