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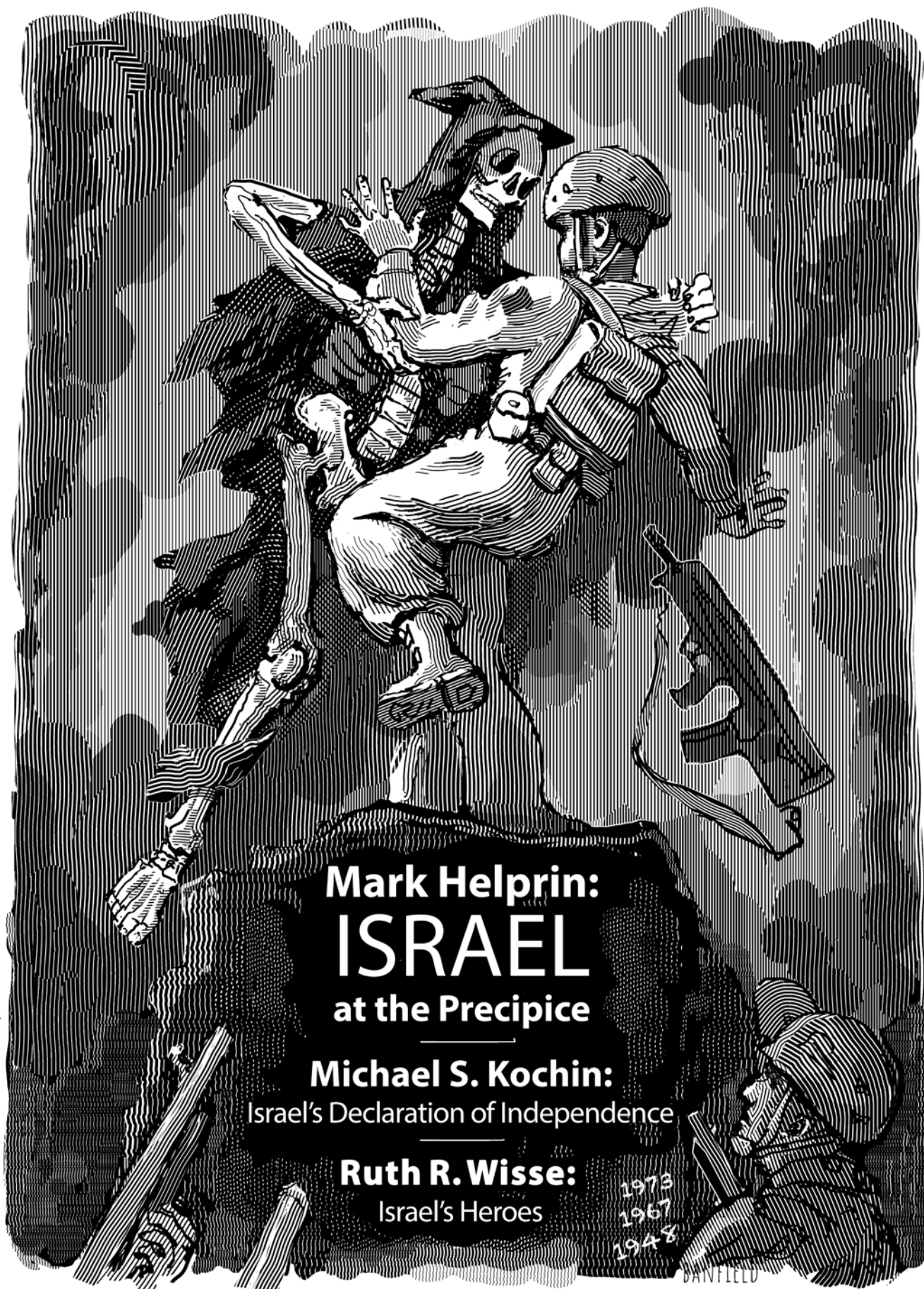
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Book Review by Ruth R. Wisse

RECLAIMING THE HOLY LAND

And None Shall Make Them Afraid: Eight Stories of the Modern State of Israel,
by Rick Richman. Encounter Books, 368 pages, \$33.99



THE ATTACKS ON ISRAELI CIVILIANS ON October 7 provoked a loss of confidence in humanity as great as the loss of life. The unspeakable horrors done to the victims have emboldened Hamas supporters to celebrate and intensify their enemy's suffering. Although nothing can mitigate the heaviness of this war, downhearted Jews and floundering Americans alike sorely need stories of heroism to inspire hope. They are in abundant supply in historian Rick Richman's latest book, *And None Shall Make Them Afraid: Eight Stories of the Modern State of Israel*.

It is a worthy successor to Richman's *Racing Against History* (2018), a character study of three Jewish leaders who petitioned for American support during the rise of Hitler. This new book tells the astounding story of how the Jews recovered sovereignty in 1948 after their land had lain under foreign domination for two millennia. So many great powers had superseded the Jews—from the Romans who conquered Judea in the first century A.D. and renamed it Palestine, to the British who seized it in 1918 from the Ottomans, who had taken it from the Mamluks, and so on. The Jews' exile from their homeland seemed so permanent that some believed diaspora was their natural condition.

Of course, it is not. Richman's title aptly reminds us of the contract that the Almighty

struck with the people of Israel in the Book of Leviticus, promising that if they followed the way of life spelled out in the Torah, they would have peace in the land. "And none shall make you afraid": millions of Jews over the centuries stubbornly clung to that promise and lived up to their part of the covenant. Perhaps none did so as creatively as the communities of Eastern Europe that were cruelly decimated in the First World War and genocidally eliminated in the Second.

By then, as if commanded by the imperatives of both divine and earthly justice, some Jews had begun to bring God's promise to life. From among the many who deserve commemoration, Richman focuses on eight heroes who helped reclaim the Holy Land.

THE BOOK STARTS WITH THEODOR Herzl, the storied founder of the Zionist movement. To be sure, others had already promoted return to the national homeland and recovered Hebrew as a language of daily use. By comparison with them, Herzl—a highly successful journalist and pundit at Vienna's *Neue Freie Presse*—had few prior links to Judaism. He came to the cause on his own, with a prophetic sense of his visionary calling.

Ignoring his employers' opposition to the Zionist project, undaunted by the discovery

that his reputation and credentials impressed neither the Rothschilds nor the rabbis from whom he sought support, Herzl seized the initiative. "If you will it, it is no dream": this famous saying of his aptly describes his life's work. Richman captures the excitement of the First Zionist Congress, held in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland. Like Moses, who also began as an outsider, Herzl spurred a national resurrection that had otherwise seemed unimaginable.

Richman turns next to the Russian chemist Chaim Weizmann, whose diplomatic breakthroughs in Britain and the Arab world did much to advance Herzl's plan. Weizmann played a crucial role in securing Prime Minister Lord Arthur Balfour's 1917 declaration that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object." No less promising were Weizmann's meetings with Iraq's Prince Faisal bin Hussein, who explicitly recognized the "national aspirations" of both Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The agreements Weizmann helped to broker remind us how differently the century would have evolved had they been honored.

Since history took quite a different course, the Jews were fortunate to have Weizmann's contemporary Vladimir "Ze'ev" Jabotin-

sky, who saw that escalating anti-Jewish violence in Palestine required a response in kind. Like Weizmann, Jabotinsky—a multi-talented and multilingual writer and public speaker—was far more inclined to intellectual than political pursuit. Yet as a hard realist he braved public excoriation by calling for the formation of a military arm strong enough to deter or defeat enemies. He died in 1940 during a speaking tour in North America, trying to promote the formation of a Jewish army to fight alongside the Allies against Nazi Germany.

WHAT ATTRACTS RICHMAN TO THESE figures is how much they had to overcome, not least in awakening their fellow Jews to the urgent need for political independence. One might therefore have expected his account to have lingered on David Ben-Gurion, the great leader of the actual Jewish state-in-formation. His pioneering cohort, mainly European-born, did the hard work of (literally) draining swamps, planting fields, establishing collective settlements, founding the city of Tel Aviv, and readying a haven for millions of refugees.

Instead, however, Richman veers aside to highlight less-familiar American contributions to the same Zionist imperative. Because Zionism was the most contested of all modern movements of national liberation, and because Israel remains today the most widely attacked of the U.N.'s 193 member states, both supporters and opponents recognize the importance of American policy and public opinion for the Jewish nation's survival. Hence Richman profiles four Americans: Louis D. Brandeis, Golda Meir, Ben Hecht, and Ron Dermer.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis was even more distant than Herzl from his Jewish heritage when he was won over to the Zionist idea and became its leading American proponent. He originally accepted the commonplace presumption that too much attachment to Jewish identity would detract from his loyalty to America. But over time he came to believe the opposite: that the traditions and character of the Jews perfectly aligned with American ideals. "To be good Americans, we must be better Jews," he proclaimed, "and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists." This maxim has only

become more urgently true as both Israeli and American democracy have suffered unrelenting attacks from the same radical factions.

AS THE ARC OF HIS STORY MOVES INTO the fateful 1930s, Richman contrasts two examples of American grit. Golda Meyerson, born in Kiev in 1898, was brought to Milwaukee in 1906 when her parents fled Russia's pogroms. Inspired in her teens by the socialist-Zionist ideal, she moved to Palestine and became prominent in Labor-Zionist politics. Richman catches her at the low point of his narrative, at the 1938 International Conference in Évian, France. Meyerson was the designated "Jewish observer from Palestine," Jews having been allowed no official representation. Convened by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, ostensibly to address the refugee problem, the conference actually blocked Jews from emigrating to their likeliest destinations—Palestine and North America. This infuriating memory of Jewish impotence remained with her until 1969 when, changing her name to Golda Meir (meaning "illuminate"), she became prime minister of Israel.

American-born Ben Hecht, another Jew who came to Zionism from the outside, had become the most famous screenwriter in America when in 1940 he was alerted to the impending Jewish tragedy in Europe. Hecht defied his quietist fellow Jews, who feared being accused of war-mongering, by staging spectacular productions to rally public support.

Richman's next subject is cut from a slightly different cloth. As biographer William Manchester said of Winston Churchill, Israeli diplomat Abba Eban could "mobilize the language and send it into battle." At age 33, he was the youngest representative to the United Nations in 1948 when he made the case to the Security Council for Israel's admission as a member state. He was heaven-sent for the charge.

Richman turns in his final pages to Ron Dermer: an American, born in 1971, who moved to Israel in 1996 and returned by 2013 to serve as ambassador to the U.S. It's a bold choice, but an effective one, to end with the contemporary and relatively little-known Dermer. Alongside the Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky, Dermer coauthored *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Over-*

come Tyranny and Terror (2004). The ideas in this robust intellectual defense of liberty against totalitarianism would serve him well when he became Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's trusted spokesman abroad. It was Dermer's case for democracy that Netanyahu would present in 2015 in a speech before a joint session of the U.S. Congress, attempting to dissuade President Obama from making the then-impending nuclear deal with Iran.

Though the deal was bound to prove a disastrous concession to an evil regime, Netanyahu was warned at the time against intervening in American affairs—as if the promises of dictators to turn Israel into a "one-bomb state" were not at least equally the concern of Israel's defender-in-chief. To this day, carryover officials from the Obama Administration remain intent on appeasing ayatollahs who are even more dedicated to that genocidal end.

THE RISE OF ISRAEL IS THE ONLY STORY of modern democratic nationhood to rival the wonder of America's founding. Both countries are still young, and in the strength of their democracy lies also their latent vulnerability as targets of envious and violent hatred. Having demonstrated America's role in the rise of modern Israel, Richman shows how security for both countries depends on their coordinated response to identical challenges. The examples of fearlessness in his book are eerily relevant with the return of antisemitism in present-day America; the reappearance of that old foe once again calls on Jews and their allies to show outspoken courage in the face of slander and hostility.

Today, when Dermer speaks for his country, he invokes the image of Golda at the Évian Conference as she helplessly watched the Western allies condemn the Jews of Europe to Hitler's plot. Dermer is determined that Jews should never again be forced to stand helplessly by as powerful nations broker their destruction. By commemorating the origins, the history, and the architects of Israel, Rick Richman honors a nation and a people determined that none shall make them afraid.

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