

Beacon Press

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

December 19, 2006



To: UUA Board of Trustees
From: Helene Atwan, Director
Re: Beacon Press Board Report

We're closing a strong year at Beacon Press, with several titles enjoying unprecedented success both in terms of sales and national attention.

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet **Mary Oliver**'s newest collection, *Thirst*, has landed on bestseller lists across the country, most recently on the *Boston Globe*'s Hardcover Fiction list, ranked alongside Michael Crichton and Mitch Albom—a remarkable accomplishment for a book of poetry. The *New York Times Book Review* recently noted that, according to Nielsen BookScan, Oliver holds the top three spots in poetry with *Thirst*, *Why I Wake Early* and *New and Selected Poems: Volume One*. We will publish a new book in October, 2007, that will join text by Oliver with photographs by Molly Malone Cook, her partner of forty years who died in 2005. *Our World* will be a uniquely intimate intertwining of their lives and art.

Another book recently made the *Boston Globe* Hardcover bestseller list, in nonfiction. **Rashid Khalidi**'s *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, is generating waves of publicity. In addition to being named one of the 100 Best Books of 2006 by *Publishers Weekly*, Khalidi has been featured on Charlie Rose, C-Span, Democracy Now!, On Point, The Bob Edwards Show, and is slated for another Beacon Press first: an appearance on *Comedy Central's The Colbert Report*. The Iron Cage has also been reviewed in the *Economist* and the *New York Times*, and is expected to be discussed in the *New York Times Book Review* soon. I'm also delighted to announce that Rashid Khalidi has accepted the UUA's invitation to be **Ware Lecturer** at GA in June of 2007.

In January, Beacon will publish the second novel of author **Laila Halaby**, who won the prestigious PEN Beyond Margins Award for her first book, *West of the Jordan*. *Once in a Promised Land* is a dramatic tale of the complex and cruel realities of life for two Arab Americans in the wake of 9/11. Andre Dubus III, author of *House of Sand and Fog*, calls Halaby's new novel, "A deeply resonant tale of our tangled and common humanity," and the book has been chosen by Barnes & Noble for its very selective **Discover Great New Writers** program.

Among our newly acquired titles:

Kathryn Joyce has been investigating a fringe Christian right movement that takes an anti-modern, anti-feminist stance. Disavowing all forms of family planning, members of "Quiverfull" seek to bear as many children as possible in order to have more influence

by sheer demographic force. Joyce's book, *Quiverfull*, will be not only a portrait of the movement, but a breakdown of its relationship to the broader conservative Christian world, and an inquiry into the implications of these movements in our society. A substantial piece based on the forthcoming book already ran in the November 27, 2006, edition of *The Nation*.



Democracy Unbound, a new book by historian and activist **Paul Ortiz** will show how issues of race and class have been inextricably bound together through the entire narrative of our country's history. Through this innovative approach to the past, Ortiz shows that it will take more than incremental public policies to address social inequality in the future.

Danya Ruttenberg's *Waking Up in New Babylon* is an account of how the author came to embrace a conservative Jewish practice—and to become a rabbi—after growing up “gently religious” in an alternative culture. Ruttenberg will describe what happens when an individual takes on a spiritual discipline in a serious manner through the lens of her own life.

Through her work as fiction editor at the online magazine Literary Mama, **Suzanne Kamata** has crafted an anthology of fiction, nonfiction and poetry on the theme of parenting children with special needs. Unlike most collections on this subject, Kamata's book will move beyond upbeat inspirational anecdotes, using literary writing to confront the challenges and realities facing these families.

Beacon author **Suzanne Strempek Shea** returns with an exciting and ambitious new book. *Sundays in America* will follow Shea's journey to 52 different Christian churches in 52 weeks. Her own quest for a meaningful spiritual home will run parallel to her search to assess how the concept of “church” has evolved in America in recent years. From the New Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Harlem to Joel Osteen's Lakewood International Center in Houston, and including a stop at the Ka-ahumanu Congregational Church in Wailuku, Maui, one at the Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints in Palmyra, New York, Rick Warren's church, King's Chapel in Boston, and the Cowboy Hall of Fame Church, Shea's pilgrimage will span the country and examine the ways Christians live their religious beliefs in the 21st century.



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Nation building

Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi explains why Palestinians have failed to create a nation and discusses the grave situation in the Middle East.

By Jonathan Shainin

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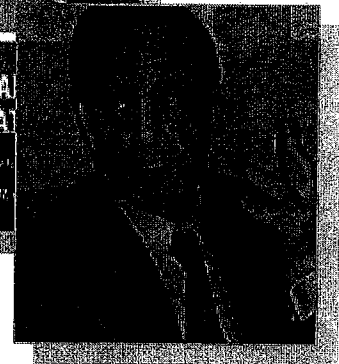
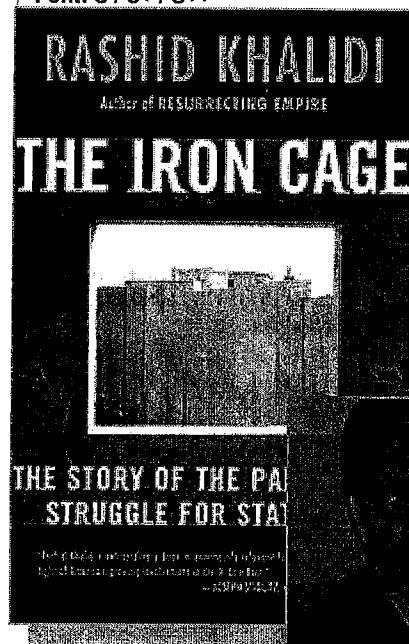
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CURRENT BOOKS

Nation building Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi explains why Palestinians have failed to create a nation and discusses the grave situation in the Middle East.

By Jonathan Shainin

Dec. 18, 2006 | For most of the 20th century, the struggle of the Palestinian people was to prove themselves to the world as a "nation," something more than a collection of unaffiliated Arab squatters who happened to make their home on a particularly hot parcel of holy land. But the invisible process



by which peoples graduate to nationhood is shrouded in mystery. A nation, as a rule, possesses an illusory timelessness. Its inhabitants are tied to one another, and to their land, by prehistoric bonds that stir the hearts of patriots yet elude definition. Nations are not created in the present, they emerge from the past, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus -- fully grown, and armed -- appearing to all the world to have

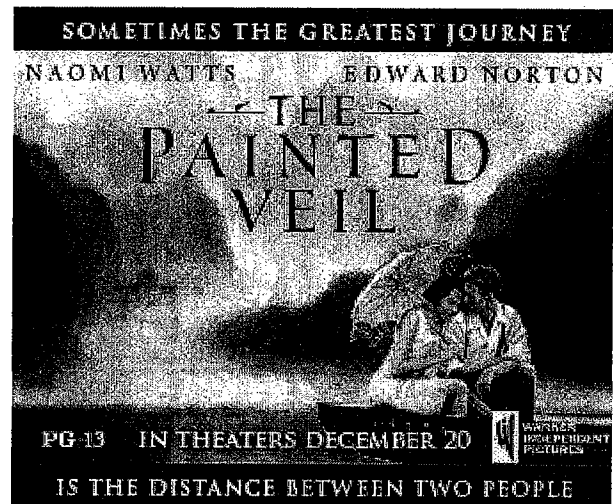
existed forever. A nation makes its home in a state, with sovereignty over its people on its "ancestral" lands. Nations that have persisted without their own states should, according to the logic of self-determination, have statehood bestowed upon them. But those peoples who have failed history's test do not get states and never will.

Reading "The Iron Cage," Rashid Khalidi's elegant history of failures and disappointments in the Palestinian quest for statehood, it is impossible not to conclude that the above puzzle encapsulates the terms of the Palestinian dilemma, one that has been dramatized by the astounding success of a competing national project in the territory both Palestinians and Israelis claim as their home.

Though one still hears, from certain disreputable quarters, the claim that the Palestinians are merely Arabs, and therefore should content themselves with residence in one of "the other 22 Arab states," most of the world now acknowledges that the Palestinians are a nation, entitled to self-determination, presumably within a state of their own. The question that remains is why they have not achieved it.

"Palestinian Identity," Khalidi's landmark 1997 study of the formation of Palestinian national consciousness before World War I, deftly untangled the mesh of overlaying identities shared by the residents of Palestine -- Arab, Ottoman, Muslim or Christian, and Palestinian -- to demonstrate authoritatively that, 50 years before Golda Meir's infamous declaration that "there are no Palestinians," Arab residents of Palestine spoke of a "Palestinian nation."

Khalidi's "The Iron Cage" picks up where "Palestinian Identity" left off, considering the situation of the Palestinians beginning after the war, when the British took possession of Palestine under a League of Nations mandate and issued the Balfour Declaration, whose stated intention was to preserve for the Jewish people a national home in Palestine. As Khalidi notes, the very structure of the mandate conferred a proto-state legitimacy on the



Zionist project and extended no such rights to the Palestinians; this distinction, in his telling, would prove to have baleful consequences for the Palestinians, under the mandate and long thereafter. In considering this situation, "The Iron Cage" attempts to answer a question left over from the prior book, in which Khalidi noted that explaining the "failure thus far to achieve statehood and sovereignty ... is a central problem of modern Palestinian historiography." "If the Palestinians had such a strong sense of identity before 1920," he explained to me, "why did it all go so wrong for them?"

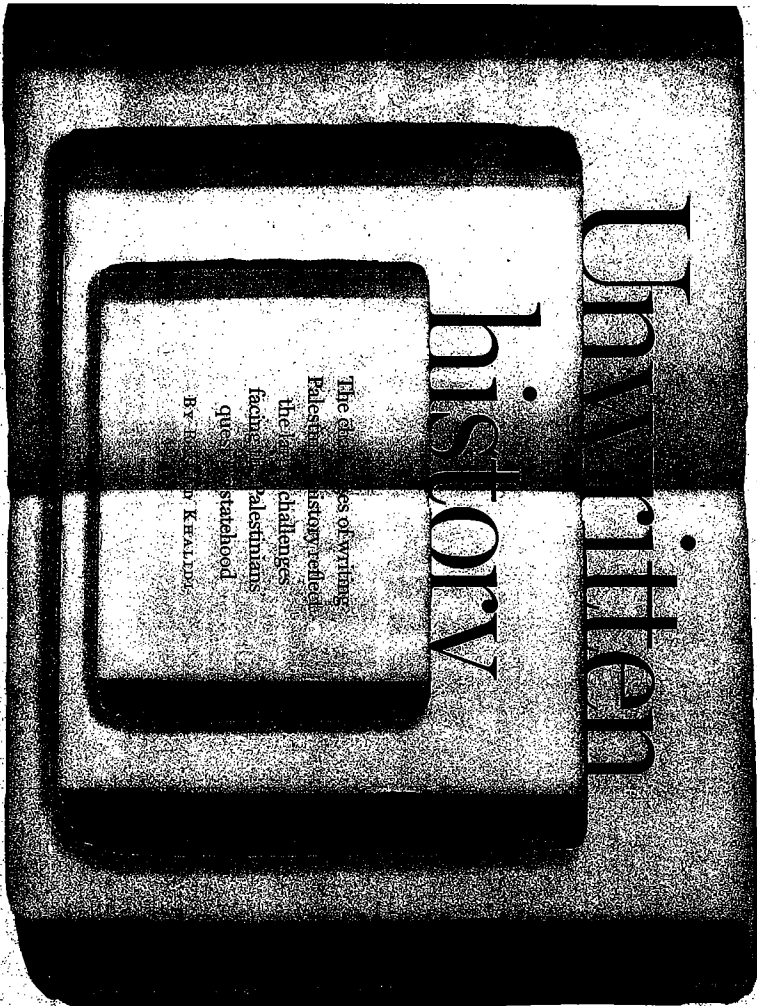
In a refreshing contrast to the yammering bazaar of complaint and allegation that has dominated American public discussion of the Middle East since Sept. 11, 2001, "The Iron Cage" is a patient and eloquent work, ranging over the whole of modern Palestinian history from World War I to the death of Yasser Arafat. Reorienting the Palestinian narrative around the attitudes and tactics of the Palestinians themselves, Khalidi lends a remarkable illumination to a story so wearily familiar it is often hard to believe anything new can be found within.

Leaves

& Books

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The challenges of writing Palestinian history, reflecting the challenges facing Palestinians in their own statehood

BY ROBERT ELSHIDI

BOOKS PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

AS I WRITE, with rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah unable to agree on the fundamental basis for a new coalition government, and with the devastating effects of the Israeli and international boycott provoked by Hamas's victory in last January's elections, the Palestinian Authority, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip appears to be teetering. Whether it survives or not, the prospect of the independent state that the Palestinians have never had, and that many expected to emerge from this Authority, seems as distant as ever.

The United Nations resolution of 1947 that led to the establishment of Israel called for such a state. In the years before that, Palestinian statehood was a goal of the British, who held a League of Nations mandate over Palestine, in part because of internal Jewish, but also because of the consolidation of forces aimed against them.

Why did the Palestinians fail to establish an independent state before 1949, and what was the impact of that failure in the years that followed, down to the present? These questions are important, first, because Palestinian history must be properly understood if we are to comprehend the present, and because this history has significance in its own right.

In the West this is a hidden history, one that is obscured by the striking and tragic narrative of modern Jewish history. In a sense, the history of the Palestinians has disappeared under the powerful impact of the painful and amply recorded story of the catastrophic fate of the Jews of Europe in the 20th century. However, achieving any serious understanding of the Middle East conflict requires comprehension of Palestinian history in its own terms, which includes

MSIPW/04

Robert Elshidi holds the Edward Said Chair in Arab Studies at Columbia University, where he directs the Middle East Institute. This essay is adapted from his new book, "The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood" (Daumen Press).

