

Noel Pearson has called 'two ideological tribes': one advocating a rights-based agenda and the other pushing a responsibilities-based agenda. (Pearson sees himself and Mundine as advocating 'a synthesis of the rights and responsibilities paradigm' and thus 'intolerably stretched trying to straddle the ideological gulf.') Nowra acknowledges the issue of rights, but it is responsibilities that he wants to talk about in this essay.

Of course, though I find that the stories do not lose their power to shock in the retelling, the plot is all too familiar to those in the field. As Professor Peter Sutton remarked in *The Australian*, 'there is unfortunately nothing new in Louis Nowra's revelations. They swept Queensland in 1999 and the rest of the country very publicly in 2001 and again in 2006.' Certainly most, if not all, of the stories were reported in *The Australian* and sometimes other newspapers at the time. Indeed, indigenous violence has been the subject of some 40 reports since 1999, among them, the Boni Robertson report in Queensland in 2000, the Gordon report in Western Australian in 2002, and the *Breaking the Silence* report in New South Wales in 2006.

But it is the non-indigenous male voice—introduced into what has been a taboo debate—that makes this essay striking. It is familiar territory for Sutton, who himself has written about how pre-colonisation social and cultural factors have contributed to the problems that indigenous communities now face and how tagging non-indigenous voices as racist to exclude them from discussion has backfired.

For me, the greatest weakness of the essay lies in the final chapter on the way forward. I wanted to

hear something new and many of Nowra's recommendations have been made time and time again, to no avail. Where Nowra does take a stronger line than most is individual responsibility. He exhorts men in the judicial system to recognise that 'human rights come before cultural rights' and exhorts men in the communities to 'take on individual responsibility and confront the perpetrators of violence.' Disappointingly, Nowra does not bridge the subject of how to cause men to take responsibility for the issue of violence. Men may be 'the problem and the solution', but how to move from problem to solution is no clearer.

The essay relied heavily on second-hand accounts and, as a reader, I would have liked footnotes to give greater weight to what otherwise might be too easily dismissed as mere assertion. (I was happy to learn that Nowra, through Pluto Press, will be making the footnotes available on the internet.) If the point of this essay is to open the issue up to a wider audience, and a non-indigenous audience, it is important that the evidential base be open and transparent.

Nevertheless, it is a powerful story and Nowra knows his craft. People, both indigenous and non-indigenous, may not want to hear what he has to say but, to my mind, the debate is the better for his voice.

Reviewed by Kirsten Storry

Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present

by **Michael B. Oren**

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One of the risks of writing a history of America in the Middle East is that the current political climate will influence the presentation of the past. It could be very easy to adopt an imperialistic interpretation of America's participation in Middle Eastern affairs from 1776 onwards, as it would be to view America's role over the last two centuries as one of liberators and freedom fighters.

To a degree, Oren has not made this mistake. The book is a genuine effort to document America's relationship with the Middle Eastern region, from its independence up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It is clear however that underlying Oren's history is an attempt to explain America's current predicament by analysing the difficulties of America's Middle Eastern policies of the past.

Oren does so by establishing three themes: power, faith, and fantasy, also the title of the book. These themes reflect not only a summary of America's relationship with the Orient but a seemingly repeated pattern of events and attitudes that have occurred since explorer John Ledyard became the first American to visit the region.

Our first glimpse of America's struggle for power, in the Middle East, are the events of the Barbary Wars and America's naval effort to free itself from constant attacks by Arab Pirates off the coast of North Africa. The American victory gave

the new nation a strengthened international reputation, but at great financial cost and the loss of many American lives. Its legacy would leave its mark in unusual places, including a primitive version of 'The Star Spangled Banner', then an old English drinking song, whose words originally described the 'turbaned heads bowed' to the 'brow of the brave'.

The book primarily aims to give greater attention to the period before World War 2. The events following the establishment of Israel, up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, are all put in context of this early period. Indeed, in introducing one of his later chapters, Oren writes that his 'objective is to enable Americans to read about the fighting in Iraq and hear the echoes of the Barbary Wars and Operation Torch or to follow presidential efforts to mediate between Palestinians and Israelis and see the shadows of Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson'.

Roosevelt would first visit the Middle East in 1872, at only fourteen years of age. His initial reaction upon sighting the coasts of Egypt—'the land of my dreams ... A land that was old when Rome was bright, was old when Troy was taken!'—typifies what Oren describes as the 'fantasy' aspect of America and the Middle East.

Fantasy, to Oren, represents an always present American attitude to the 'ideal' of the Middle East, in the 'ethereal montage of minarets and pyramids, oases, camels, and dunes', exemplified by the enormously influential book *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. It is a fascination that, while drawing many Americans towards the region, from explorers, to

writers, and to future presidents, nonetheless creates a misguided and even naïve approach to handling the harsh realities of Middle Eastern affairs.

Roosevelt would visit Egypt again in 1910, this time in the growing heat of a nationalist movement. It was a movement that he did not support on the grounds that a British withdrawal would result in bloodshed and particularly the loss of women's rights. While nationalist supporters protested outside his hotel, yelling out chants such as 'Down with the Occupation', Roosevelt would see such harsh realities first hand.

Perhaps the most important theme Oren describes is faith. The nineteenth century would see thousands of Americans migrate to the Middle East in the hope of spreading Christian theology and culture. It coincided with the concept of America's 'Manifest Destiny' in expanding

westward. Indeed, the originator of the term, New York journalist John O'Sullivan, would identify America's right to 'establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man'. One missionary would proclaim to a group of Lebanese, 'We have come to raise your ... population from that state of ignorance, degradation, and death which you are fallen, to do all the good in our power'. Oren details quite well the irony of many Middle Eastern nationalists being educated at institutions established by American migrants, and of the diffusion of American ideals into the Arab nationalist psyche.

It is these themes that Oren asks us to identify when observing contemporary American foreign policy. He concludes that 'the themes

that evolved over the course of more than two centuries of America's interaction with the Middle East will continue to distinguish those ties, binding and animating them for generations' and that 'the United States can be expected to pursue the traditional patterns of its Middle East involvement'.

In this sense, there are times that Oren's book reads almost like an existentialist piece. The constant power struggles, the reconciliation of romance and realism, the continual tensions of different religions, all are stories that Oren illustrates in different periods. One of the repeating characteristics of Oren's writing is to compare contemporary persons to earlier protagonists who faced similar circumstances, such as his interview with a returned soldier from Iraq—'He spoke, and for a moment I actually imagined myself listening to John Ledyard'. At times, one cannot help feel that Oren has developed a picture of America as a modern day Sisyphus.

The conclusion may not provide startling revelations, but such a comprehensive history is bound to make any person understand America's relationship with the Middle East just that little bit clearer, and Oren's accessible and entertaining writing style will certainly make this important history reach a wide audience.

Reviewed by Andrew Kemp

