

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, October 23, 7:30 PM. Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Tuesday, November 11, 7:30 PM. Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty

Sunday, November 16, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "Crossing Mandelbaum Gate" by Kai Bird.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

A lot has been happening in the human rights world this month. Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who was shot by the Taliban, won the Nobel Peace Prize along with Kailash Satyarthi, an Indian activist who fights against child labor.

Pro-democracy students have been demonstrating in Hong Kong over local elections. Our friend Ann Lau has been involved in organizing support for the HK protestors here in LA. Let's hope the HK students are successful.

Con Cariño,
Kathy

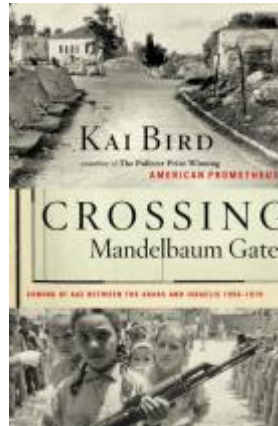
RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

Keep up with Rights Readers at
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

Next Rights Readers meeting:
Sunday, November 16, 6:30 PM
Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado, Pasadena

BOOK REVIEW by Neil MacFarquhar
The New York Times, April 16, 2010



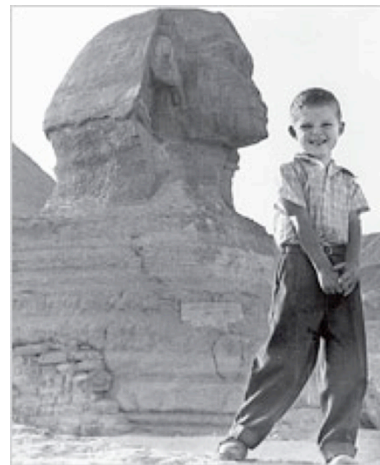
Crossing Mandelbaum Gate: Coming of Age Between the Arabs and Israelis, 1956-1978

by Kai Bird

When playing the "conquer the world" board game Risk as an adolescent growing up in a well-to-do Cairo suburb, Kai Bird avoided occupying the Middle

East. So did his American friends. Their very surroundings schooled them in the difficulty of holding the crossroads of three continents.

Bird's education in the region's seemingly endless cycles of war and armistice actually began when he was 4. In 1956, his father, Eugene Bird, an adventurous sort if not a terribly worldly one, moved his young family from Oregon to East Jerusalem, where he was to begin his new job as the American vice consul.



Kai Bird at Giza, above, 1958. From *Crossing Mandelbaum Gate*.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli war had left the city divided in two, with soldiers, minefields and coiled barbed wire gashing an often tense cease-fire line between [Palestinian](#) East and Israeli West. The line also divided the twin pillars of Kai's life. The family's rented house stood on the Arab side, but Kai attended the Anglican Mission School across the barbed wire. So he was driven almost daily through Mandelbaum

Gate, the single crossing, its name drawn from the remnants of a once splendid family villa on the spot. (Technically the “gate” was two facing checkpoints.)

Ordinary Arabs and Jews could not cross, but Kai was an outsider. “My perspective was privileged,” he writes. The schoolboy’s commute across the chasm dividing the Middle East continued in a sense through more than two decades, culminating in his marriage to Susan Goldmark, the American-born daughter of Holocaust survivors. It is Bird’s various transits that inform his memoir, “Crossing Mandelbaum Gate: Coming of Age Between the Arabs and Israelis, 1956-1978.”

The result is a meandering family scrapbook cobbled together with an earnest, condensed history of the region during those years. It illuminates a common experience among expatriates who crisscross the Middle East without being emotionally bonded to any side. They grow frustrated that the Arabs and Israelis — whom they come to know as two vital, charming, urbane, hospitable peoples — cannot see past the sense of their own victimhood to accept the other as a neighbor.

“Most of the time I feel like telling Jews and Arabs alike that the best thing the U.S. could do is leave them their silly pile of rocks to fight over — for we couldn’t care less,” Bird’s mother, Jerine, wrote in a letter. (Bird relies heavily on his parents’ letters to reconstruct the family history.)

Ultimately, many foreigners do walk away, saddened that both sides would rather stunt their futures than compromise. Bird did. After leaving the Middle East, he worked as an editor at *The Nation* and wrote a string of biographies about major American figures, winning a [Pulitzer Prize](#) in 2006 together with Martin J. Sherwin for their book about J. Robert Oppenheimer.

But he was pulled back to the Middle East both by the dramatic tales of his in-laws’ fleeing Nazi Austria and by nostalgia for his childhood spent among Palestinians, Saudis, Lebanese and Egyptians. Ignoring the region, he writes, was an “abdication.”

The Birds experienced the Middle East at a more innocent time. In 1965, Eugene was assigned to Cairo, and the family started its Egyptian sojourn with a three-week road trip in an American station wagon across North Africa from Casablanca.

This being the Middle East, however, each decade was punctuated by at least one major crisis. During the 1956 Suez war, Bird was evacuated from Jerusalem to Beirut, which he fondly remembers for his sudden access to hamburgers. At the start of the next war, in 1967, he was evacuated from Cairo to Greece; he packed his snorkeling gear. The United States, Bird notes, once made considerable progress in the Middle East by not hesitating to throw its weight around. The Eisenhower administration, for example, brokered a cease-fire during the Suez crisis by threatening Israel with economic sanctions.

Revisiting the Middle East after an extended hiatus, Bird sometimes strains to braid himself into current events. Maadi, his teenage home, he notes, was also where [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#), [Al Qaeda](#)’s second in command, was raised. Bird never met him, but writes, “I can easily imagine myself bicycling past the 14-year-old Ayman.”

Bird makes occasional mistakes. It was Tahseen Bashir, a witty Egyptian diplomat, who uttered the famous phrase that (except for his motherland) Middle Eastern countries were merely “tribes with flags.” Bird attributes it to former President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Arabic for a consultative council, or *majlis al-shura*, is rendered incorrectly as *majlis al-shurwa*.

And while Bird covers a lot of history, sometimes he tries to do too much too quickly, resulting in groaning sentences like this one about Saudi Arabia: “In the early morning hours of Nov. 20, 1979, some 300 to 500 extremists, led by a former national guardsman, Juhayman ibn Muhammad ibn Saif al-Uteybi, seized control of Islam’s holiest shrine, the Grand Mosque of Mecca, which surrounds the Kaaba, the granite cuboidal structure draped with a black silk curtain, to which Muslims turn in prayer.”

Still, Bird sprinkles his book with engaging miniature portraits of overlooked characters and events. There is George Antonius, the Jerusalem author of a seminal work, “*The Arab Awakening*,” with his utopian vision of a democratic, multiethnic Palestine with all Jews, Arabs and Christians living as equal citizens. And there is Hillel Kook, confronting the United States about rescuing Europe’s Jews and then battling to keep Israel secular. Bird also recounts how the Saudi royal family ruthlessly put down a budding labor movement in the oil fields — political suppression feeding the tumor of Muslim extremism.

Bird experienced the Arab world at a distance, mostly from inside the cloister of American diplomatic compounds and expatriate schools. But the final quarter of the book, devoted to his in-laws' escapes from the Nazis, gains vibrancy from his closeness to his subjects. Here the book rips along like a spy novel (even though we know how it comes out). Will Viktor Goldmark survive the war in a southern Italian internment camp or be dispatched to a more certain fate? When Helma Blühweis uses her fluent German and Aryan looks to work as a secretary at a Luftwaffe command center in Rome, will the officers discover that she is a Jew hoping to steal authentic letterhead for the resistance?

By the end, the book has succeeded in explaining the perspectives of two peoples who view the Middle East conflict through different lenses. One filters it through the Holocaust, or Shoah, the other through the Nakba, the Arabic word for the disaster wrought by Israel's war of independence. Bird tells the sad twin stories of Mrs. Goldmark, his mother-in-law, being unable to reclaim her lost home in Graz, just as Dr. Vicken Kalbian, a Palestinian family friend in East Jerusalem, cannot recover his confiscated Jerusalem house.

These are mirror images, but the trauma engendered blocks each side from seeing its reflection in the other. What's more, Bird argues, outsiders, in Washington in particular, have exploited the conflict for their own interests rather than pursuing true reconciliation.

At the age of 5, Bird attended a reception with his parents at Jerusalem's landmark American Colony Hotel, where an elderly American heiress offered \$1 million to anyone who could solve the Arab-Israel dispute. Tugging on his father's sleeve, he says, "Daddy, we have to win this prize." Sadly, more than 50 years later, no one has.

AUTHOR BIO



Kai Bird is the co-author with Martin J. Sherwin of the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (2005), which also won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography and the Duff Cooper Prize for History

in London. He wrote *The Chairman: John J. McCloy, the Making of the American Establishment* (1992) and *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy & William Bundy, Brothers in Arms* (1998). He is also co-editor with Lawrence Lifschultz of *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (1998). He is the recipient of fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Alicia Patterson Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Thomas J. Watson Foundation, the German Marshall Fund, the Rockefeller Foundation's Study Center, Bellagio, Italy and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC. He is an elected member of the Society of American Historians and a contributing editor of *The Nation*. He lives in Miami Beach with his wife Susan Goldmark.

Security with Human Rights

By Robert Adams

The Terrifying Reason 64% of Mexicans Fear Detention

by Esmeralda Lopez, Amnesty International USA Country Specialist for Mexico
September 5, 2014

My desire to end torture in Mexico runs deep. Years ago **it became too dangerous for me to visit my family in Mexico** because they are only hours from Ciudad Juarez, a hot spot of violence. Some officers point to incidents of violence and the high crime rate as justification for use of torture. But I know torture is not the solution.

The problem of torture in Mexico

Torture is illegal, unjustifiable, and not the means to tackle violence. Ironically instead of feeling shame about the indiscriminate use of torture by Mexican police and armed forces, **Mexican authorities have been dismissive if not dishonest in responding.**

In May 2014, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture concluded that torture is widespread in Mexico. In response, the Mexican government touted sentencing 119 persons for torture, but the truth is only four people have been convicted and sentenced for torture.

Why the discrepancy between the official story and reality? At the heart of the problem, **the institutions tasked with tackling torture lack either the tools or the political will.** The

National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH), a national government body, investigates complaints of torture by federal authorities. However it does not document complaints of torture by state or municipal officials. Even when the Commission makes a recommendation it rarely results in a prompt and impartial criminal investigation.

What can be done

While **the creation of a human rights commission has been a significant first step in the battle against torture**, its failure to investigate and prosecute fully complaints of torture highlights the systemic problem of impunity the Mexican government allows to flourish.

Amnesty International has documented cases of torture in Mexico for over five decades. While the nature of the problem has shifted significantly over those fifty years, it has yet to disappear. Just this week, Amnesty International issued a new report that makes clear the new and continued urgency of **speaking out now to end the nightmare of torture and ill-treatment in Mexico today**.

The report finds high levels of torture by the military and law enforcement. It is clear that impunity for those acts is ongoing and a serious human rights concern in Mexico: **Sixty-four percent of Mexicans live in fear of being tortured** if they are detained by state authorities. Two in every three people! And for good reason: Mexico has seen a **600% increase in torture and other ill-treatment** over the last decade.

The face of torture

Claudia Medina Tamariz makes up one piece of this hellacious statistic. On August 7, 2012, the navy broke into her home, took her to a naval base, beat her, and subjected her to electric shocks. They accused the mother of three of being a member of a violent criminal gang and forced her to sign a confession she wasn't allowed to read. Claudia has made repeated appeals, but to date, no one has been held accountable for Claudia's torture. She, like countless other survivors of torture in Mexico, is still waiting for justice.

Stopping torture starts now

The problem of torture in Mexico is real and deep. But the solution is also real and present. **Don't make Claudia stand alone**. And don't let it take another decade –or another day—to stop

torture in Mexico. Act today to stand with Claudia and help end torture in Mexico now!

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Bang the drums, beat the cymbals! No one's been executed since I last wrote this column. Now with that said, Texas and Missouri have prisoners awaiting execution October 28 and 29 respectively.

The Innocent Walk As Free People

Manuel Velez

Early in October, Manuel Velez left the Texas prison system, and death row, a free man. In 2008, Mr. Velez was convicted of murdering his girlfriend's year-old son because of injuries found on the baby after he died. The injuries, however, were inflicted when Mr. Velez was in Tennessee working construction. While in custody, he signed a statement in which he confessed to hurting the child, but an article in *Texas Monthly* said the language in the statement contained "curiously sophisticated language," especially for a man who is functionally illiterate in both Spanish and English and who has an IQ of 65.

The ACLU's Capital Punishment Project and the American Bar Association's Capital Representation Project took over Mr. Velez's case and enlisted the firms Carrington, Coleman, Sloman & Blumenthal, LLP and Lewis, Roca, Rothberger LLP to work pro bono on it. These lawyers discovered Mr. Velez's attorneys, Hector Villarreal and O. Rene Flores, did not present the evidence that Mr. Velez was in Tennessee at the time the injuries were inflicted.

In 2012 when during a retrial, attorneys Villarreal and Flores argued "that people in impoverished South Texas were entitled to a lower standard of defense than those in more prosperous precincts." The judge, Elia Cornejo Lopez, disagreed.

Mr. Velez is only one of 12 of the over 500 death row inmates on the Texas death row who have been exonerated since 1982.

Susan Mellen

For 17 years, Susan Mellen sat in prison, convicted of a murder she did not commit.

Fortunately, she was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, so when Deidre O'Connor from Innocence Matters looked into her case, she was still alive.

Testimony from June Patti, known by her police officer sister as a pathological liar and a habitual giver of false tips, was used to convict Ms Mellen. Her connection to the murdered man, Richard Daly, was that she was his former girlfriend. Three gang members were later linked to the crime and one was eventually convicted of the murder. Another gang member took a polygraph test and admitted Ms Mellen was not at the scene of the murder.

Ultimately, Superior Court Judge Mark Arnold ruled Ms. Mellen had inadequate representation by her attorney at the trial and he overturned her conviction. After 17 years, Ms Mellen is reunited with her children, Julie Carroll, 39; Jessica Besch, 26; and Donald Mellen, 25. She also has met, held, and hugged her 16-month-old grandson, Aidan.

As the judge said when she thanked him for her freedom, "Good luck."

We as a nation are quite fortunate to have groups such as the ACLU's Capital Punishment Project, the American Bar Association's Capital Representation Project, and Innocence Matters.

Amnesty International Points to Florida

The US continues to be in the top five countries worldwide to use the death penalty alongside Iraq, China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. As executions continue to decline, Amnesty is concerned about Florida's Timely Justice Act.

The Timely Justice Act allows Florida to execute inmates as quickly as possible after their appeals are exhausted. One troubling aspect of Florida's use of the death penalty is that it allows for a simple 7-5 verdict by a jury to sentence someone to death.

Amnesty International's Chiara Sangiorgio said, "One of the biggest concerns we had this year was the adoption of legislation in Florida that aims at streamlining executions." As we've seen in the cases of Manuel Velez and Susan Mellen, they could have been streamlined to deaths of the innocent.

Botched Executions

Given the number of lethal injection executions that have caused us to pause because of the length or pain inflicted on the dying, the topic of

botched executions comes to mind. Now according to some of the comments following articles addressing these executions, the people are dead; therefore, the executions are not 'botched.'

With that said, a recent article, "The U.S. Supreme Court: Clearing the Way for Botched Executions Since 1879," addresses the history of these events. If you are so inclined, go to http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gilbert-king/the-us-supreme-court-clearing_the-way_for_botched_executions_since_1879.html to check it out.

Shout Out

Here's to author Louise Penny who in *The Long Way Home* has her main character, Chief Inspector Armand Gamache - retired homicide detective, say he, too, had found that like Sr. Helen Prejean, "people are more than the worst thing they have ever done in their lives."

Many thanks to Louise Penny for embedding that piece of wisdom in her novel.

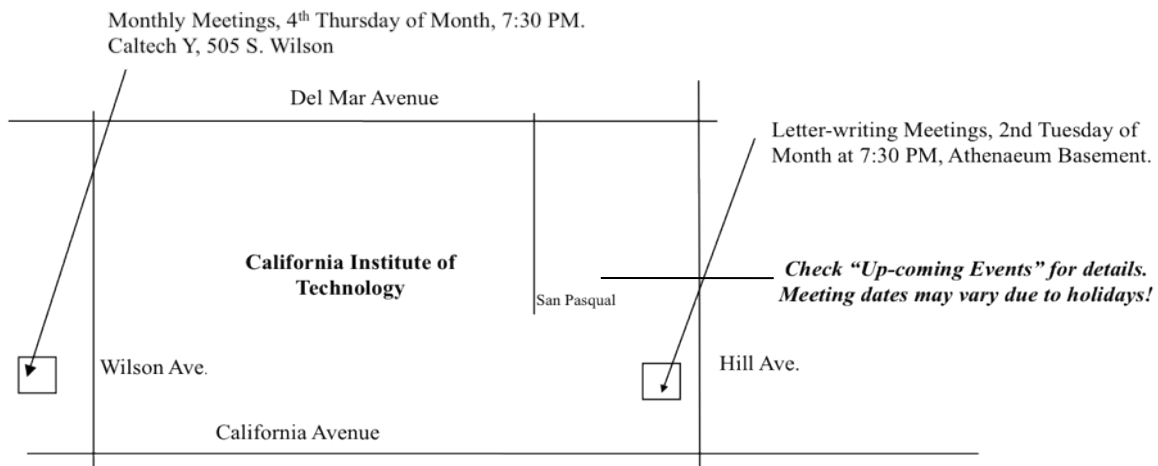
Executions Stayed

September		
13	Hubert Michael	Pennsylvania
October		
7	Billy Ray Irick	Tennessee
15	Larry Hatton	Texas
15	Raymond Tibbets	Ohio

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE
Gao Zhisheng
by Joyce Wolf

Please see our September newsletter for actions for Gao Zhisheng in regard to President Obama's upcoming trip to China Nov. 10-12. www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/news/2014/sep14.pdf

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	19
Total	19
To add your letters to the total contact aigp22@caltech.edu	



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22
The Caltech Y
Mail Code C1-128
Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.