honors Palestinians’ parallel passion for this beleaguered land.

Were Israel as committed to justice as to Jewishness, its internal democracy would not be threatened by the Law of Return, because, beyond instant citizenship, Jews would enjoy no special rights. Jewish institutions would not receive disproportionate resources. Jewish neighborhoods would not be better served by public utilities and government agencies. The Jewish National Fund would not have the power to deny non-Jews the right to live, work or run a business on “state lands.” Jewish votes would not count more than votes of other citizens in the psychology of electoral legitimacy. Jewish officials would be held accountable for the impact of their policies on non-Jews. Orthodox political parties would not be permitted to hijack the political process for the exclusive advantage of their own communities. The rabbinate would not control the laws of “personal status” that affect every citizen.

But then, some might ask, what would make the Jewish state Jewish? Culture. Historical markers. Educational priorities. Hebrew as an official language. Jewish holidays. If Christmas qualifies as a national holiday in our democracy, why not Hanukkah in Israel? If Thanksgiving and July 4 can be celebrated by all Americans, including those without the remotest connection to the Pilgrims or the Founding Fathers, why can’t Yom Ha’atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) or Tisha B’Av be official commemorations in Israel? If “bombs bursting in air” can be glorified in our national anthem, nefesh Yehudi (the Jewish spirit) can be tolerated in Hatikva. If Sunday remains the pre-eminent day of rest here, with shuttered liquor stores to prove it, Israeli banks can be closed on Shabbat.

Just as American history takes precedence in our school curricula, Jewish history can hold pride of place in Israel. If American teachers can struggle with competing narratives—about cowboys and Indians, or the McCarthy era, or the Confederate flag—Israeli educators can haggle over conflicting perspectives on the British Mandate, the War of Independence or the Zionist dream.

More than anything else, Jews can make the state Jewish by acting Jewishly. This is tachlis, not tautology. Israel needs more Jews who are willing to pay for the privilege of citizenship with the practice of justice: Jews who actualize Jewish values in their everyday life rather than merely speak the right words in synagogue. Jews who do not oppress the stranger, do not treat the Other as they would not wish to be treated, and never forget that each human being was created in God’s image. Jews who seek peace and pursue it.

Letter From South Carolina
by Paul Wachter

Shortly after Strom Thurmond died, the flags at the South Carolina Statehouse in Columbia were lowered to half-staff. Every flag except one, that is. There on the northern grounds below the Capitol steps, facing Main Street, the Confederate flag waved high. On that late-June evening, the flag served as a visible, and shameful, reminder: Racial politics in the South would long outlive their most resilient practitioner.

Thurmond’s death marked the end of an era, in that he was one of the South’s last living political links to the days of colored water fountains and segregated lunch counters. But even as that era is passing into history, history itself is becoming a battleground, demonstrating once again the truth of William Faulkner’s famous line: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

On one side is the version of history promoted by conservative whites, who venerate the brave Confederate soldiers and their gallant generals. On the other side are blacks and the beleaguered, shrinking ranks of liberal whites, who prefer to speak about slavery as the horror it was. Now, a pair of major museum projects—one an unvarnished memorial to the realities of slavery, the other a celebration of the Confederacy—are about to make permanent the segregation of the region’s history. Both will be located in or near Charleston, the heart of the antebellum South, where the Civil War started.

The first project, a museum of African-American history, is being spearheaded by Charleston’s popular long-term Democratic mayor, Joe Riley, a white progressive who has built his career on racial reconciliation. The second project, a museum for the Hunley, a Confederate submarine recovered off Charleston’s coast, is championed by Confederate-obsessed Republican State Senator Glenn McConnell, playing to the same impulses that fuel the pro-flag movement.

In the coming years, Riley and McConnell likely will be competing for limited public funds. But more important, they also will be competing to define how the South views its history—and by extension, how the rest of the country views the South. “This is always how it’s been down here, unfortunately,” said Democratic State Senator Darrell Jackson, an African-American whose slave ancestors were freed in the Civil War. “In this state there are two histories of South Carolina: one for the descendants of white slaveowners, the other for the descendants of slaves.”

These competing histories spill over into national politics. The “vital South”—the eleven states of the old Confederacy—is the nation’s most populous region, home to 84 million people according to the 2000 census. Courting African-American voters ahead of South Carolina’s February 3 primary, the first in the South, most of the Democratic presidential candidates have already declared their opposition to the Confederate flag’s presence on the Statehouse grounds. For Republicans, the conservative white vote is more important, which is why, during his 2000
primary run, George W. Bush made a controversial appearance at Bob Jones University.

"In much of the Deep South you’re seeing increasing separation between the races—in politics for sure, but also in residential patterns and schools," said Dan Carter, an award-winning historian at the University of South Carolina. Carter believes the two museum projects are symbols of this resegregation. "There will be two very different visions of the past, existing parallel."

Mayor Riley’s project, the proposed $40 million International Museum of African-American History, to be completed by 2007, promises to provide an honest look at the history of slavery in Charleston, where nearly half of all slaves brought to the United States first landed. Riley, 60, recalled that growing up in Charleston, he was uncomfortable with the Jim Crow norms. “I remember once as a young child, we were in a restaurant,” he said. “A slender, dignified-looking African-American waiter asked me a question—I don’t remember what. I answered ‘yes sir’ or ‘no sir.’” When the waiter was out of earshot, Riley said, his father scolded him. “He told me, ‘You don’t say ‘yes sir’ or a ‘no sir.’”—Riley paused—“an African-American.”

A Brooklyn Dodgers fan, Riley admired African-American athletes like Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella and Joe Black. He also idolized Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders, who, he said, “exposed white Southerners of goodwill to their conscience.” When he joined the state legislature in 1968, Riley helped dismantle the Jim Crow system under which he had been raised. And six years later, at the urging of African-American leaders and prominent white businessmen, he ran for mayor promising to promote racial harmony.

Now, Riley hopes the African-American history museum will help fulfill that promise. But that doesn’t mean avoiding harsh truths, according to Representative James Clyburn, chairman of the museum’s steering committee and the first and only African-American to represent South Carolina in Congress since Reconstruction. “The museum will accurately depict the history of Africans leaving their native lands, going through the Middle Passage and living as slaves,” Clyburn said.

Meanwhile, Clyburn's friend, State Senator Jackson, has misgivings about the motives behind Charleston’s other major museum project, showcasing the Hunley. “These guys are always talking about ‘showing courage against the enemy,’” he said. “Well, that enemy was the United States of America, which set my ancestors free.”

Still, the Hunley, which was recovered off Charleston in 2000, has some historical significance: In 1864 it became the world’s first submarine to sink an enemy ship (it sank, for reasons unknown, on its way back to port). Currently, the rusty vessel is stored in a conservation center in North Charleston.

McConnell, the champion of the Hunley Museum and South Carolina’s most powerful state senator, runs a Confederate memorabilia store just a few exits down Interstate 26 from the Hunley. On a recent day he wore a tie decorated with the state flag—in Confederate red, not blue—and a wristwatch with a Confederate flag insignia. His cell phone, in a Confederate flag—embazoned plastic sheath, is programmed to play “Dixie.” McConnell’s store is stocked with hundreds of such items as portraits of Civil War generals and rolls of toilet paper bearing Sherman’s image.

McConnell, 55, said his passion for the Confederacy came late in life. “My grandfather was very anti-Sherman, but other than that, my parents didn’t drill it into me,” he said. He recalled that his interest was piqued during a legislative controversy in the 1980s, when state officials refused to allow the newly discovered remains of a Confederate soldier to lie in state at the Capitol. From then on, McConnell became increasingly interested. He participated in Civil War re-enactments and opened his Confederate memorabilia shop in 1989. But it wasn’t until 1995, when the Hunley was discovered off Charleston’s coast, that he found his true passion, and he now heads the nine-member state commission that oversees the Hunley project. The all-white Hunley Commission also includes five other Republican state legislators and Chris Sullivan, editor of Southern Partisan, a Confederate apologist magazine based in Columbia.

In its current location, the Hunley shares space with a concession area offering such items as Confederate T-shirts and bolls of cotton. The conservation center was packed during my two visits, but I never saw an African-American. If McConnell, a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, gets his way, the Hunley museum will offer no apologies for slavery. “Racism existed in all quadrants of the United States during the War Between the States, and it’s only the practice of modern politics to heap the blame for racism on the South,” he said.

Riley and McConnell are formidable political forces, and both likely will see their projects to fruition. Riley said he will rely primarily on private financing to build the African-American history museum, which is one reason he recruited former President Bill Clinton to serve as honorary international advisory board chairman. Meanwhile, McConnell is counting on public funding for his estimated $40 million museum, which should be completed in a few years; taxpayers have already spent $8 million to raise and preserve the submarine. (The state has also committed to spending another $3.5 million to purchase a Civil War painting and artifact collection to be displayed alongside it.)

Nearly 140 years after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, the Civil War, according to Emory University political scientist Merle Black, “remains the most traumatic, most significant episode in Southern history.” And the battle over the war’s meaning—the “two histories” State Senator Jackson referred to—continues to dominate Southern politics. “We’re close to having a white Republican Party and a black Democratic Party,” said the University of South Carolina’s Carter. “Whites like Riley are the exception. There are entire counties in South Carolina where you could fire a cannon in every direction and you wouldn’t hit a white Democrat.”

A look at the 2000 presidential election bears Carter out. Though he won only 8 percent of the African-American vote in the South, George W. Bush was able to sweep the region by winning 67 percent of the white vote. Bush’s victory underscored an unsettling truth: In a region where African-Americans account for only
20 percent of the electorate, major elections are determined by white voters. “It’s a simple formula,” said Black. “To win elections in the South, Republicans have to win more than 60 percent of the white vote, while Democrats have to win more than 40 percent.”

The erosion of the solid Democratic South is a familiar story. In recent years, the Republican surge has been abetted by the rise of the white middle class and the conservative religious movement. Al Gore’s populist campaign did not resonate with these voters, Black said. “His father could have won on that campaign, maybe, back in 1950,” Black said. Instead, Southern white moderates and conservatives are more receptive to a message of lower taxes and “family values.”

They also respond to racial appeals. Bush’s Bob Jones visit recalled Ronald Reagan’s campaign trip to Philadelphia, Mississippi, two decades earlier. Both men demonstrated their conservative bona fides to white Southerners. Bush by speaking at a university that banned interracial dating, Reagan by visiting—at Mississippi Representative Trent Lott’s urging—a community where three civil rights workers were killed with the help of local police officers in 1964. And more recently, Jim Hodges and Roy Barnes, the respective former Democratic governors of South Carolina and Georgia, lost their 2002 re-election bids thanks, in part, to their efforts to tone down the official display of the Confederate flag.

For many Southerners—including myself—the official display of the Confederate flag is an embarrassment. Nevertheless, it forces Southerners into an increasingly rare public debate over their common, disputed history. None of the politicians or historians I spoke with thought the two future Charleston museums would prove as controversial. This is not surprising, since, to put it crudely, with the International Museum of African-American History and the Hunley Museum, blacks will have their history and whites will have theirs. And so, I’m afraid, the museums—in the guise of education, no less—will not only come to symbolize the South’s segregated past but also its segregated present and future.

(Continued From Page 2)

As for David Rawson, his letter perfectly illustrates the Masada complex that the pro-Israel camp has done so much to cultivate. On one side is the Jewish state, while on the other are various leftists, “pro-Palestinian partisans” and terrorists seeking its destruction. All criticism of the Jewish state is therefore disingenuous and can be safely disregarded. The more the world complains about Israel’s behavior, the more justified it feels in hollering “anti-Semitism!” and reaching for its gun. If the world complains about Israel’s behavior, the more justifiable it feels in hollering “anti-Semitism!” and reaching for its gun. Instead, leave them to stew on some impoverished reservation, it permits them to join forces with Jewish workers in order to challenge the very idea of a reserve army of labor. Democracy is more important to the poor and oppressed, not less.

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Finally, let me assure Julie Adams that I fully share her desire to see Ariel Sharon tossed out on his tuchus. My point was merely that Israelis and Palestinians should jointly change the rules of the game so that his sort of politics are nipped in the bud.

G. L. LAZARE

EDUCATION FOR SOME

New York City

In David L. Kirp’s “No Brainer” [Nov. 10], the President’s education bill is referred to as a “leave no child behind” act. “Leave No Child Behind” is actually the trademarked slogan of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), an organization that has given children a voice in the halls of power for thirty years. The Bush Administration cleverly named its single-issue education bill No Child Left Behind. The word games may fool some people, but the inadequate funding for this bill fools no one. There is little chance it will improve outcomes in most school districts. Neither will it prepare children to enter school ready to learn.

On the other hand, the comprehensive Dodd-Miller Act to Leave No Child Behind (S. 448/H.R. 936), which CDF supports, recognizes that children don’t come in pieces and addresses all the needs of children, including childcare, health insurance for all children, Head Start for every eligible child who needs it, housing, nutrition and prevention from child abuse and neglect. The Bush Administration’s word games make children the losers.

DONNA A. LAWRENCE

Children’s Defense Fund

DeKalb, Ill.

David Kirp says, “Today’s male college graduates make $32,000 a year more than those with only a high school diploma, up from a $15,000 difference in 1975, after adjusting for inflation.”

In 1975 I was a student at the City University of New York, paying $41.20 for a full-time semester, in the last year before the city went broke and CUNY started charging tuition. I will always be grateful to the taxpayers for foot- ing the bill, because I would otherwise never have attempted college. But when I was in college, when the BA was perceived as a social investment, the majority of college students were men. Today, when it’s perceived to be a ticket to financial security, the majority of college students are women. I see it in my own classes. I teach in a university program for under-prepared students from low-income families. Their loans will crush them six months after they graduate. They are overwhelmingly female, in some sections by a ratio of ten to one. By the way, I don’t make $32,000 more than those with only a high school diploma. I make $30,000, period.

GEORGIANNA HENRY

CORRECTIONS

In Matt Taibbi’s “Clark’s True Colors” in last week’s issue, it was John Kerry, not John Edwards, who spoke first at the labor rally in Whitefield, New Hampshire. Edwards did not attend. And the quote “Next thing you know, it’ll be the Campaign of One” was mistakenly attributed to Arnie Alpert; someone else, whose name was not recorded by Taibbi, made the remark. We apologize for the errors.