INTRODUCTION

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In early September 1991 Edward Said traveled to London to attend a conference he had organized. Taking place on the eve of the Madrid Peace Conference, the event was made up of Palestinian intellectuals and activists who heeded Said's call for joining together in a position of strength to counter the weakness of the Palestinian situation after the Gulf War. It turned out to be a conference of disappointments for Said, full of "the endless repetition of well-known arguments." Midway through it, Said telephoned his wife in New York and asked for the results of his annual physical, as he was concerned about his cholesterol. The cholesterol was fine, his wife told him, but she added that he should call his doctor when he returned to New York. There was something in the hesitation of her voice, Said recalls, that made him call Dr. Hazzi immediately. It was there, in a stolen moment between debates, that Said discovered that he had leukemia.

Edward Said has the uncanny ability to find himself on the losing side of time. The tragic convergences of this story—while fighting for the disappearing voice of his people he learns he has the fight for his own life ahead of him—seem the stuff of Shakespeare. But Said is no Othello, full of destructive self-pity. His self-made role has been to challenge authority, not to assume it, although his intellect and accomplishments have been nothing less than magisterial.

Anti-dynastic, rigorous, erudite, polemical, and always driven by a quest for secular justice, Said's contribution is the clear vision and moral energy to turn catastrophe into ethical challenge and scholarship into intellectual obligation. This means, of course, that he is often on the wrong side of power, challenging the status quo and
our critical conscience in a world divided by conflict and driven by arrogant oppression. It is this quality of speaking out on the side of the oppressed that puts Said in the long tradition of engaged intellectuals, people like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Angela Davis, Frantz Fanon, Noam Chomsky, C. L. R James, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and Huda Shaarawi—those who seek, as Marx once noted, not just to interpret the world, but to change it. Said’s commitments to his people, to his scholarship, and to his own talents have made him arguably the most important intellectual of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Like many intellectuals of the turbulent twentieth century, Said has had to reckon with his life as an exile, and the pain of exile has been a grounding philosophy to all his work. Born to a wealthy Palestinian family in Jerusalem in 1935, Said—like the vast majority of Palestinians—was displaced and dispossessed of his home and homeland by the cataclysmic events of 1948. He eventually moved to the United States in 1951, but to live in exile is to exist somehow in an embattled relationship with time. Said’s dissonances with the temporal, however, do not remain on the philosophical level. Tirelessly on the side of the weak and the forgotten, he has become the primary spokesperson in the West for the Palestinians, crafting books and articles, appearing regularly on television and radio, lecturing an American and Western public on the injustices inflicted on them.

This exposure comes with a price. Said is routinely vilified in much of the popular press. He has been dubbed a “professor of terror,” and “Arafat’s man in New York.” His Columbia University office has been ransacked, he has received numerous death threats, and the New York City Police Department once considered his life in enough peril to install a “panic button” in his apartment. Yet he remains wedded to his principles and unceded by authority. In September 1993, when the White House called Said and asked him attend the signing ceremony for the Oslo agreements (which he opposed for several reasons, including the fact that the agreements said nothing about the forgotten majority of Palestinians who now reside outside of Gaza and the West Bank), Said declined, telling them the day should be known as a Palestinian “day of mourning.”

This impulse to bring to light truths that powerful forces either obscure, suppress, or distort can be found not only in Said’s work as a Palestinian activist but in almost all of his work, from his literary and music criticism to his political pieces. Orientalism, his 1978 book on the Western representations of the Muslim Middle East, forced a major rethinking of the workings of culture precisely because it argued that political ideas of domination and colonization can find their strength and justification in the production of cultural knowledge. At a time when most American literary scholarship was engaged in highly specialized, esoteric textual practices to discover “universal truths,” Orientalism forced academics of all kinds to reevaluate the political nature and consequences of their work in the ensuing storm. The Question of Palestine, a highly learned and polemical work, harnessed this same drive to reveal how European colonialism, Zionism, and American geopolitics have all systematically excluded and dispossessed Palestinians from their homeland and dehumanized them to the point where they were almost prevented from representing their existence. In Culture and Imperialism, Said elucidated a more general relationship between imperial ideology and the workings of culture and argued that even the small world drawn by the treasured literary icon Jane Austen is deeply imbricated in the material facts of European colonialism.

What has occupied much of Said’s energies has been the role and vocation of the intellectual. Europe’s study of the Orient was, after all, for Said an “intellectual” (as well as a human) failure. In The World, the Text, and the Critic, Said argues that “criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom,” and he posits that the most useful adjective to be joined to criticism would be oppositional. In another essay (“Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community”) he advocates that “the politics of interpretation demand a dialectical response from a critical consciousness [a repeating phrase in Said’s work] worthy of its name. Instead of noninterference and specialization, there must be interference, crossing of borders and obstacles, a determined attempt to generalize exactly at those points where generalizations seem impossible to make.” And in Representations of the Intellectual, he again puts forth the idea that “[I]least of all should an intellectual be there to make his/her audiences feel good; the whole point [to being
an intellectual] is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant.\textsuperscript{75} For Said, his life has been a commitment to two things: an incorruptible, unassailable belief in the dignity of all people and human justice for everyone, and a lifelong pursuit in the rigors of scholarship to excavate, uncover, review, and interpret all facets of human experience, particularly those that are overlooked by any structure of authority. With these commitments, Said's oppositional stance becomes not merely a radical posture but a manner of living.

Said's deliberate opposition to authority needs to be considered in connection with his meditations on exile. "It is a part of morality not to be at home in one's home," wrote the German philosopher Theodor Adorno,\textsuperscript{6} and Said's own ethics derive in significant part precisely from this sense of "homelessness." Living as an exile and thus in an ambivalent relationship with two cultures often at odds with each other (American and Arab), Said has often described how he feels not quite at home in either one. Yet rather than lament this condition of displacement, as many in the twentieth century have done, Said offers a qualified celebration of the possibilities it affords. "Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision give rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal.... There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be."\textsuperscript{77}

Out of displacement and discomfort, Said weaves an approach to the major questions of our era that is neither self-indulgent nor self-pitying. There is no silence or cunning involved in Said's exile; instead there is the cultivation of a critical consciousness and, perhaps, as Mary McCarthy has described exile, "an oscillation between melancholy and euphoria."\textsuperscript{78} Said's exile has enabled him to see his surroundings slightly askew of those at home in them. "Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate," Said tells us, "it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the

comfortable." If alienation from exile was the paradigmatic mode of the first part of the century, Said's "pleasures of exile" offer a way to think beyond alienation and embrace creativity and critique.

Noam Chomsky has described Said's intellectual contribution in this manner: "His scholarly work has been devoted to unraveling mythologies about ourselves and our interpretation of others, reshaping our perceptions of what the rest of the world is and what we are. The second is the harder task; nothing's harder than looking into the mirror." Chomsky, himself a veteran of the media wars, continues: "Edward's in an ambivalent position in relation to the media and mainstream culture: his contributions are recognized, yet he's the target of constant vilification. It comes with the turf if you separate yourself from the dominant culture."\textsuperscript{79}

What Chomsky describes is, in one way, a possible irony of Said's work. Despite the criticism that he incurs and the provocative issues he forces his audiences to confront, Said has achieved a remarkable level of influence and recognition. He holds one of the eight University Professorships at Columbia University (University Professor is the highest rank possible for faculty at Columbia). He has published twenty books, which have been translated into thirty-one languages. Over two hundred universities around the world have heard him lecture, and he has delivered prestigious lecture series such as the Reith Lectures for the BBC, the Empson Lectures at Cambridge University, the René Wellek Memorial Lectures at the University of California-Irvine, the Henry Stafford Little Lecture at Princeton University, the T. B. Davie Academic Freedom Lecture at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, a series of lectures of the Collège de France, and many others. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Royal Society of Literature, and an Honorary member of King's College, Cambridge. He has been a member of the Executive Board of PEN, is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and was president of the Modern Language Association (1999). He has been awarded numerous honorary doctorates, from institutions of higher learning including the University of Chicago, Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, Bir Zeit University in the West Bank, the University of Michigan, the American University in Cairo, and the National University of Ireland. He is also the music critic for the \textit{Nation}.

In addressing this apparent contradiction—the success of an
oppositional critic—it is important to recognize first of all that despite his status, Said is routinely vilified and dismissed by certain segments of the population (particularly for his continued advocacy of the Palestinian cause). More important, however, Said's reception is instructive for what it reveals about intellectual labor and about the possibilities of a just future for all. "There is no such thing as a private intellectual," Said explains in *Representations of the Intellectual*, "since the moment you set down words and then publish them you have entered a public world. Nor is there only a public intellectual, someone who exists just as a figurehead or spokesperson or symbol of a cause, movement, or position. There is always the personal inflection and the private sensibility, and those give meaning to what is being said or written." Said's own manner of "personal inflection," his passionate yet reasoned intellect, his erudite yet democratic spirit, his elegance of prose and presentation, have in important ways contributed to the reception of his intellectual beliefs in justice and coexistence in an increasingly fractured world.

Of even greater significance, however, is that the integrity of the work, committed to the universal application of basic human rights, is globally appreciated. Our overwhelming need to hear and read someone like Edward Said is a double-sided signifier. On the one hand, it reveals that the dominant ways of political power continue to deny basic human rights to people everywhere. Around the world, people feel the need for ideas that can challenge and usurp the triumphalist thinking of Eurocentric colonialism or the defensive reactions of nativist ideologies. This desire to engage with Said—by Indonesians and Parisians, from the Irish to the Iroquois—is perhaps felt even more so today, as bland pronouncements of globalization often mean little more than extending the military and economic reach of the United States, and the confusing reactions to global power fall prey to simple "us" versus "them" dichotomies. Forever wedded to the possibilities of mutual coexistence and universal recognition, Said's thought has helped many think their way through the minefields not only of the Palestinian struggle, but also of many other such conflicts the world over. On the other hand, the fact that Said has built such a large readership is itself indicative not only of the power of his ideas but also of the future possibilities for justice and dignity contained therein.

Edward Said was born in November 1935 in his family's two-story home in Talbiyah, a section of West Jerusalem inhabited at the time almost exclusively by Palestinian Christians. He would be the eldest son in a family of four sisters. Having lost an earlier child shortly after childbirth in Cairo, Said's mother was determined that her next be born in Jerusalem, and the Saids, living mainly in Cairo at the time, journeyed back to Jerusalem that summer and waited for their son's birth in his uncle and aunt's house. The itinerant lifestyle that would mark Said's later life, both as a Palestinian living in exile and as a world renowned intellectual, was established for Edward even before he was born.

Said's father, Wadie, a Jerusalemite, had moved to Cairo in 1929 to establish the Standard Stationary Company, the Egyptian branch of the Palestine Educational Company, a concern founded by Boulos Said, Wadie's cousin and the husband to his sister Nabiha. In 1932 Wadie married Edward's mother Hilda Musa, born in Nazareth, who had earlier been a gifted young student at the American School for Girls in Beirut (her mother was Lebanese). Said's father was a strict, almost Victorian man who believed in the value of an education and uncritically in the worth of the United States. He was made up of "an absolute, unarguable paradox, repression and liberation opening on to each other." Said's relationship with his mother, full of tender mercies and filial devotion, was marked by the need to seek her affections, where he often found a nurturing repose, and the fear that these same affections could be capriciously withdrawn. He calls her "my closest and most intimate companion for the first twenty-five years of my life," and although his father unfailingly supported Said's artistic hunger—by providing him with piano lessons from the age of six, opera visits, a rich library—it was through his mother that the young Edward began to cultivate his aesthetic sensibility. Mother and son read *Hamlet* together in the front reception room of their Cairo apartment when the young Edward was only nine years old.

Interestingly, both parents had a historic connection to the United States. Hilda Said's father, who was a Baptist minister in Nazareth, had studied for a time in Texas. Said's father, who had been urged to leave Palestine by his father to avoid conscription in
the Ottoman army, had sojourned to the United States in 1911 after a brief six-month stint in Liverpool. From Liverpool, he and a Palestinian friend took jobs on an American passenger liner as stewards, later disembarking in New York without valid papers. Eventually, he became a salesman for ARCO, a Cleveland paint company, studied at Case Western Reserve University, and upon hearing that the Canadians were sending a battalion "to fight the Turks in Palestine" during World War I, he crossed the border and enlisted. When he found out that no such battalion existed, he deserted and crossed back to the United States, where he joined the American Expeditionary Force. Based first in Georgia, Wadie Said was then sent to France to fight for the Americans. After the war, he returned to Cleveland and established his own paint company. Upon the urgings of his mother who wanted him nearby, he returned to Palestine in 1920 as an American citizen.

Despite her father's history with the United States and her husband's citizenship, Hilda Said never assumed American citizenship. After 1948, her citizenship as a stateless Palestinian presented numerous problems for the Saids. Told that she would have to reside in the United States for two years to acquire citizenship, she refused, and only after 1956, with the help of the Lebanese ambassador to Egypt, did she obtain a Lebanese passport. Twenty years later, with the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, even this passport created problems. Having come to the United States on a visitor's visa to receive treatment for breast cancer, she overstayed the official date, and despite the fact that she was hospitalized and comatose, the Immigration and Naturalization Service began deportation proceedings against her. The case was thrown out by an angry judge who rebuked the INS for its insensitivity.

As was common at the time for families of means, the Saids traveled often and easily between the different countries of the region. Cairo was the place of the family business, Jerusalem the center of family and relatives, and a Lebanese mountain village, Dhour el-Shweir, was the site of annual summer vacations. In Cairo, Said received a strict and unhappy colonial education, first at the Gezira Preparatory School (GPS), where there were no Egyptian teachers. He describes the colonial atmosphere of GPS as "one of unquestioned assent framed with hateful servility by teachers and students alike." The family was now living in Zamalek, a Cairo neighbor-
tered life as a young teenager, and he survived his schooling through compliance to authority, with little sense of who he was except a nagging feeling of being always out of place. After finishing CSAC in 1949, he went to Victoria College in Cairo, a prestigious but cheerless colonial school where Arabic was outlawed and English mores and institutions were strenuously taught and reinforced. In 1951 Said was sent to the United States, where he was enrolled at Mount Hermon, a puritanical New England boarding school. It was there that Said first encountered teachers who broadened his intellectual curiosity and helped him rediscover his passion for the piano. By the end of his two years there, he had become a pianist of note, and academically he was one of the top two students in his class. Despite his successes, however, Said still felt himself an outsider in this environment, and his feelings were confirmed when he was denied any role in the graduation ceremonies. Accepted to both Princeton and Harvard, Said began at Princeton the next year.

Oppressed by the rigid club system, Said despised the oligarchic nature of Princeton in the 1950s, though writing about it now he observes: "a new faculty, the deemphasis of the wretched clubs, and of course, the presence of women and minorities have transformed [Princeton] from the provincial, small-minded college I attended between 1953 and 1957 into a genuine university." Twenty professors, however, did have a profound influence on Said, notably the literary critic R. P. Blackmur (whose work on close, explicatory reading would influence much of Said's writing, particularly on literature and music), and the philosophy professor Arthur Szathmary, whose critical point of view was passed on to Said. At Princeton, Said was finally exposed to the pleasures of academic rigor as opposed to rote learning, and after graduating Phi Beta Kappa he received a scholarship for graduate study at Harvard, which he deferred for one year.

That year was spent mostly in Cairo, and it proved a difficult time for his father's business as Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt embarked on his campaign of "Arab socialism." Eventually the family business was sold to the Nasser government, and the family, squeezed by their resident alien status in Nasser's Egypt, packed and moved to Lebanon. Said returned to the United States to spend the next five years at Harvard, working on a dissertation on Joseph Conrad under the supervision of Harry Levin and Monroe Engel, and, when in Cairo, continuing to study piano under Ignace Tiegerman. During his Harvard years, Said's political life remained dormant as he immersed himself in being a graduate student of literature. In 1959 a family friend of the Saidis, Farid Haddad, "a profoundly political man" and a medical doctor in Cairo who had worked closely with Said's aunt Nabihah, was jailed, beaten, and killed by the Egyptian security forces for his dedicated activity in the Egyptian Communist Party. Said was—and continues to be—deeply affected by the murder: "Farid's life and death have been an underground motif in my life for four decades now, not all of them periods of awareness or of active political struggle." He would later dedicate The Question of Palestine to Farid Haddad (and to the Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein). After completing his dissertation, in 1963, Said accepted a position as an instructor at Columbia University and has lived in New York ever since. His prodigious intellectual life was about to begin.

Said's first book, Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography (1966), was a fastidious, methodical investigation of the interplay between Conrad's fiction and his correspondence. If it reveals anything about Said and his predicament, it does so in purely abstract and existential terms centered on the condition of Conrad's alienation. As a young literary scholar teaching at Columbia University in the 1960s—where he was surrounded by figures like Lionel Trilling and E.W. Dupee—Said had placed himself in an environment that presented few reminders of his past and his identity. In 1967 all that would change.

The Arab-Israeli war shattered and dashed Palestinian hopes of returning home. Within seven days in 1967 Israel defeated the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and went on to occupy the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. As Said recalled in Out of Place, the 1967 war "seemed to embody the dislocation that subsumed all the other losses, the disappeared worlds of my youth, the unpolitical years of my education, the assumption of disengaged teaching at Columbia . . . I was no longer the same person after 1967; the shock of that war drove me back to where it had all started." It was out of the experience of 1967, as a Palestinian living in the United States, that Said conceived the central theme of Orientalism. "The Arab Portrayed," which he wrote in 1968 at the
behest of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, attacked the way Arabs were portrayed in the media as only sheikhs or terrorists. For the first time, Said expressed an interest in the politics of cultural representation; he wrote: “If the Arab occupies space enough for attention it is a negative value. He is seen as a disruptor of Israel’s and the West’s existence, or . . . as a surmountable obstacle to Israel’s creation in 1948. Palestine was imagined as an empty desert waiting to burst into bloom, its inhabitants inconsequential nomads possessing no stable claim to the land and therefore no cultural permanence.”

The war also made Said reconnect with friends and relatives in the Palestinian political community in Amman and Beirut. “I began to feel that what happened in the Arab World concerned me personally and could no longer be accepted with a passive political disenchantment,” he wrote. In 1969 he met with Kamal Nasser, a distant relative and poet who served as a Palestinian official spokesperson until an Israeli hit squad assassinated him in Beirut in 1973. Said began meeting diplomats from the United Nations in New York as his circle of associates expanded. He had been planning a book on Jonathan Swift, but his attention shifted to another idea that formed the basis for his second book, Beginnings. “Beginnings was really a project of reaction to a crisis which caused me to rethink what I was doing, and try to make more connections in my life between things that had been either suppressed, or denied, or hidden,” Said recalled. “It was the product of the 1967 War.”

For Said, Beginnings was an attempt to work through the conditions of his political awakening in literary terms. In the high modernist novels of Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann, he saw that beginnings were crucial to understanding how certain individuals (or narrators) negotiated authority, the power of tradition, the constraints and dictates of convention, and above all, the limits of narrative form. As Hayden White observed, Beginnings was a political allegory, an almost introspective work that abstractly engaged the problem of how to begin to grasp the relationship between the past and the circumstances and exigencies of the present.

The eighteenth-century Italian philologist Giambattista Vico gave Beginnings its political and philosophical coherence. Vico’s importance remained for Said almost as unshakably symbolic as Conrad’s. In Beginnings, Said called Vico “a prototypical modern thinker” who “perceives beginning as an activity requiring the writer to maintain an unstraying obligation to practical reality and sympathetic imagination in equally strong parts.” Vico represented a method of situating and unfolding the literary work of art in all its worldly, secular relations. Furthermore, he challenged the specialization and sequestering of knowledge. “Vico’s New Science,” Said wrote, “is everywhere a reminder that scholars hide, overlook, or mistreat the gross physical evidences of human activity, including their own.”

Said took Vico’s New Science to heart. By the early 1970s, he became increasingly more active and engaged as a public intellectual. He began writing for a wider audience in English, Arabic, and French. He wrote op-eds on Palestine for The New York Times, Newsweek, and Le Monde diplomatique. His reputation as an engaged Palestinian intellectual was beginning to emerge. In an editorial for The New York Times, Said declared, “the Jews are not a chosen people, but Jews and Arabs together, one as oppressor and the other as oppressed, have chosen each other for a struggle whose roots seem to go deeper with each year, and whose future seems less thinkable and resolvable each year. Neither people can develop without the other there, harassing, taunting, fighting . . . Each is the other.” In 1975 he testified before the U.S. Congressional Subcommittee on International Relations: “Imagine to yourselves,” he told the committee chaired by Representative Lee Hamilton, “that by some malicious irony you found yourselves declared foreigners in your own country. This is the essence of the Palestinian’s fate during the twentieth century.”

In 1976, two years prior to the publication of Orientalism, Said won Columbia University’s Lionel Trilling Award for Beginnings, and a year later he was promoted to Parr Professor of English and Comparative Literature. Said’s presence and visibility in the United States was seen as indispensable to the Palestinian National Council (PNC). In 1977 Said, along with his friend Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, was elected to the PNC as an independent, choosing not to ally himself with any of the member parties. Over the fourteen years that he was a member, Said attended fewer than six PNC meetings, and he took orders from nobody, according to Shafiq al-Hout, a long-time friend and member of the executive council of the PLO.
According to Said, his membership in the PNC was largely "an act of solidarity," allowing him to assert his Palestinian identity to act politically on behalf of Palestinian self-determination. 30

On sabbatical leave at Stanford University from 1975 to 1976, Said returned to the question he raised in "The Arab Portrayed" and completed Orientalism. If Beginnings dealt with questions of authority and power in terms of literary debates about language and narrative, Orientalism engaged the themes of knowledge and power in much more explicit ways. It examined an array of nineteenth-century French and British novelists, poets, politicians, philologists, historians, travelers, and imperial administrators. Together, their writings made up a discipline (Orientalism) by which European culture produced and managed the "Orient." Their writings expressed "a will ... not only to understand what [was] non-European, but also to control and manipulate what was manifestly different." 31 They formed a medium that constituted power and through which power was exercised.

The contemporary Orientalist guild and its defenders responded fiercely to Said's polemic. Leon Wieseltier wrote that Orientalism issued "little more than abject canards of Arab propaganda." 32 In a riposte published in The New York Review of Books, Bernard Lewis accused Said of "poisoning" the field of "Oriental" studies. Calling Said "reckless," "arbitrary," "insouciant," and "outrageous," Lewis recounted how Said, along with other Arab, Muslim, and Marxist critics, had "polluted" the word "Orientalism." Said, Lewis argued, had attempted to denigrate the work of well-intentioned, disinterested Orientalists; he had politicized an innocent scholarship. 33 Yet the shrill protests from Said's critics revealed less about Said's work than about the critics' own hypocrisy. Veiled in language of "scholarship" and "objectivity," their indignation was, as Talat Asad put it, "an indication of the Orientalist attitudes that Said himself had described." 34 Said pointed out that Lewis had merely "delivered ahistorical and willful political assertions in the form of scholarly argument, a practice thoroughly in keeping with the least creditable aspects of old-fashioned colonialist Orientalism." 35

By the late 1970s, Said's work was beginning to gain acceptance and acclaim from a wider public. In 1979 Orientalism was runner-up in the "Criticism" category for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Said wrote a number of articles for Time magazine and several more op-eds for The New York Times that year in which he popularized many of the themes that he had discussed in Orientalism and related them to the Palestinian question. In 1979 he published his book The Question of Palestine, departing from traditional literary scholarship and into a more political, cultural, and historical investigation of Palestinian dispossession. If Orientalism defined the theories of imperialism at the level of representation, The Question of Palestine delved into the brute practices of the various colonialisms that the Palestinians have endured. American publishers found The Question of Palestine too provocative to publish. Beacon Press and Pantheon rejected the manuscript. Furthermore, many Palestinians took issue with Said's support for a two-state solution. When a Beirut publisher offered to bring the book out in Arabic, it asked Said to remove his criticism of Syria and Saudi Arabia. Said refused, and although the book was published in Israel, it still has not appeared in Arabic.

In 1979 Times Books published The Question of Palestine, and the next year Vintage Books brought out the paperback of this major work. Said suggested in The Question of Palestine that the political impasse between Zionism and the Palestinians was historically and culturally grounded in an unwillingness on the part of Zionism to recognize the realities and experiences of the Palestinians. "An iron circle of inhumanity" circumscribed them both. Although most Palestinians "fully realize that Israeli Jewish people ... are a concrete reality," Said argued, Israel's repudiation of the existence of Palestinians prevented a resolution of the conflict. Said thus supported a two-state solution, a position that openly opposed PLO politics, although many in the PLO also realized this option was a greater possibility than liberating historical Palestine. Indeed, by 1980 Israel directly controlled large portions of the West Bank and Gaza, enforcing and justifying its military authority on colonial grounds—a dubious extension of the 1936 Emergency Regulation Act that the British had adopted to suppress Arab labor strikes. Zionism's vision thus rested on England's colonial legacy. Said wrote: "In joining the general Western enthusiasm for overseas territorial acquisition, Zionism never spoke of itself unambiguously as a Jewish liberation movement, but rather as a Jewish movement for colonial settlement in the Orient." 36

In 1979 Said began writing Covering Islam, the third book in the
Orientalism trilogy. The United States was in grips of the “hostage crisis,” after Iranian students seized the American embassy in Teheran on November 4, 1979, and demanded that the United States turn over Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlevi for trial. Hardly a day went by that the media didn’t give special coverage to the “revival of Islam.” Said broadened the Orientalism argument to expose the underlying ethnocentric assumptions of the view that “Islam” was a homogeneous and monolithic threat to U.S. hegemony. He advocated that reporters and critics develop a sense of internationalism and “worldliness” to grasp the events in Iran in the greater context of U.S. involvement in the overthrow of Mossadegh and the brutality of the U.S.-trained Iranian secret police known as SAVAK.

At the same time that Said was engaged with international affairs, he continued to devote a lot of his attention to the state of the literary profession. In essays such as “Traveling Theory,” “Reflections on American ‘Left’ Literary Criticism,” and others that made up his sixth book, The World, the Text, and the Critic, Said assailed a different kind of provincialism and unworldliness that he saw threatening the study and interpretation of literature. He perceived that a great deal of literary theory was provincial in its connection to a cult of professionalism that transformed scholars into myopic specialists. He urged academics “to break out of the disciplinary ghettos in which . . . [they] have been confined.” Even among the post-structuralists—whom he originally admired—he lamented the cultivation of “corrosive irony.” Of the influential literary critic Paul de Man, Said wrote: “De Man is always interested in showing that when critics or poets believe themselves to be stating something, they are really revealing . . . the impossible premises of stating anything at all, the so-called aporias of thought to which de Man believes all great literature always returns.” Leftist criticism fared no better in his judgment: “We argue in theory for what in practice we never do, and we do the same kind of thing with regard to what we oppose.” For Said, it was imperative that literary criticism not lose sight of its own conditions in the world and the political circumstances that demanded critical attention.

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 deeply troubled Said, who feared for the safety of his own family and relatives there. That summer, Israel relentlessly bombarded Beirut from the air and from the sea, with cluster bombs, vacuum bombs, phosphorous rockets, and mortars. On the evening of September 16, 1982, with prior knowledge and support of the Israeli Defense Forces, Christian Phalangist militias massacred 2,662 Palestinians and Lebanese at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. The attack was a coordinated part of Israel’s invasion. Yet few in the West raised concern about Israel’s attack. “How is it,” Said asked in “Permission to Narrate,” an article published in the London Review of Books, “that the premises on which Western support for Israel is based are still maintained even though the reality, the facts, cannot possibly bear these premises out?” By labeling Palestinians as terrorists, Said answered, Israel and the West had systematically suppressed the reality of the Palestinian experience of dispossession. In the Raritan Quarterly, Richard Poirier reiterated Said’s charge: “Feelings about the victims of the siege [on Beirut] could not . . . be attached to an idea for the creation of a Palestinian homeland, since . . . no such idea has yet managed to find an enabling vocabulary within what is considered ‘reasonable’ political discourse in the . . . [United States].” In Le Monde diplomatique, Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk offered proof that the goal of Israeli policy in the mid-1970s was to undermine Palestinian nationalism by defining its main expression—the PLO—as terrorist. “The better,” Said wrote, “to be able to ignore [Palestinians]’ undeniable claims to Israel.”

As Said recognized, it was becoming increasingly important to represent Palestinian experience in all its facets. In the spring of 1984 this exigency acquired a renewed urgency: Harper and Row published Joan Peters’s From Time Immemorial, a compendium of historical fabrications that incredibly sought to deny the historical existence of Palestinians. Despite its reliance on spurious and contrived evidence, the work received widespread acclaim. Barbara Tuchman, Elie Wiesel, Saul Bellow, Theodor White, and other prominent authors praised the book. Few reviewers in the United States questioned the book’s veracity. It was Norman Finkelstein, then a graduate student at Princeton University, however, who exposed the book as a complete hoax. Said wrote in The Nation, “To read Peters and her supporters is for Palestinians to experience an extended act of ethnocide carried out by pseudoscholarship. Tom Sawyer attends his own funeral as a kind of lark, whereas we are being threatened with death before being permitted birth.”
If Palestinians existed at all in the imagination of the West, they were represented "not so much a people as a call to arms."47 In an effort to demystify everyday Palestinian life, Said, who was serving as a consultant for the United Nations International Conference on the Question of Palestine (ICQP), proposed a UN exhibition of Swiss photographer Jean Mohr's work, which presented the daily reality of the Palestinian experience. Said viewed the purpose of the exhibition as to "deny the habitually simple, even harmful representations of Palestinians, and to replace them with something more capable of capturing the complex reality of their experience."48 Although the United Nations approved of the photographs, it found Said's accompanying captions "controversial" and decided to permit the exhibit only if Said's captions were removed. A number of Arab states, it seemed, had disagreed with Mohr and Said's intentions. "Palestine to them was useful to a point—for attacking Israel, for railing against Zionism, imperialism, and the United States.... Beyond that point," Said wrote, "when it came to the urgent needs of Palestinians as a people, or to the deplorable conditions in which many Palestinians live in Arab countries as well as Israel, lines had to be drawn."49 Together the photographs and captions were published in After the Last Sky (1986), Said's first major autobiographical work.

In After the Last Sky, Said dwelled on the themes of loss and exile, echoing the themes expressed in his first book on Joseph Conrad. Exile was an existential reality for Said who, as a member of PNC, was prohibited from visiting Israel. "Our truest reality," he wrote, "is expressed in the way we [Palestinians] cross over from one place to another. We are migrants and perhaps hybrids, in but not of any situation in which we find ourselves. This is the deepest continuity of our lives as a nation in exile and constantly on the move."50 Said's work acquired a more mournful tone as he considered exile a symbolically powerful, yet tragic condition. In "Reflections on Exile," he observed, "exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. [I]t is life outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal;... no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew."51

In the face of loss and exile, Said devoted more and more of his energies to writing about music, which had always for him had the Proustian capacity to recover lost time and place. A talented pianist, Said began writing a music column for The Nation magazine in 1987. Of all the performers he reviewed, he had the highest regard for the pianist Glenn Gould, whose technical and intellectual majesty recalled Said's interest in Vico and Auerbach's philological method. "[As you listen to Gould's music," Said wrote in Vanity Fair, "you feel as if you are watching a tightly packed, dense work being unfolded, resolved almost, into a set of intertwined links held together not by two hands but by ten fingers, each responsive to all the others, as well as to the two hands and the one mind really back of everything."52 His work on music continued. In 1989 Said delivered the prestigious Wellesly Library Lectures at University of California, Irvine, in which he accompanied his talk with his own performance on the piano. The result, in printed form, was Musical Elaborations (1991), which further extended his reflections on the place of music in society.

Said's reflections on Gould's contrapuntal technique had far-reaching implications for his cultural and literary criticism. In Culture and Imperialism (1993), he adapted a musical term for literary criticism, arguing that literary works should be considered contrapuntally. By contrapuntal criticism Said meant that European culture needs to be read in relation to its geographic and spatial relations to empire as well as in counterpoint to the works the colonized themselves produced in response to colonial domination. In his widely debated chapter "Jane Austen and Empire," for example, Said argued that "we should...regard the geographical division of the world—after all significant in Mansfield Park—as not neutral, but as politically charged, beseeching the attention and elucidation its considerable proportions require. The question is not only how to understand and with what to connect Austen's morality and its social basis, but what to read of it."

Almost without exception, reviewers of Culture and Imperialism focused on "Jane Austen and Empire." The New York Times, The London Review of Books, The Nation, and Dissent all published articles that emphasized Said's criticism of Mansfield Park.53 In The Nation, John Leonard wrote: "See Jane sit in the poise and order of Mansfield Park, not much bothering her pretty head about the fact that harmonious 'social space,' Sir Thomas Bertram's country estate, is sustained by slave labor."54 Said's argument was that Austen's vision of Fanny Price's moral improvement rested on the
estate's dependency on its slave holdings in Antigua, largely absent from the groomed and ordered grounds of Mansfield Park. Many critics misunderstood Said’s argument. Irving Howe, for example, saw Said’s essay as an attack on Austen’s status as a novelist. Yet Said was not demeaning Austen’s literary value; he was urging readers to develop a critical awareness of the European novel’s relations to the colonial enterprises and imperial projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

By the early 1990s, Said’s reputation had assumed international proportions, through both his eloquent pleas for justice for the Palestinians and the innovative humanistic scholarship he was producing. Orientalism had been translated into French, German, Spanish, Catalan, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Japanese, Korean, and Swedish. The work had an enormously wide-ranging impact in the humanities and social sciences. An entire field of postcolonial studies was beginning to develop around Said’s work. While a younger generation of scholars were actively pursuing the critiques of culture and power found in Said’s work, Said himself was making a greater effort to situate the Palestinian struggle in relation to other national liberation movements around the world—in Vietnam, Algeria, Latin America, the Caribbean, Ireland, and South Africa. This effort to look critically and comparatively at other colonial resistance movements represented Said’s own expanding vision of the relevance of his work both as a Palestinian exile and as an engaged scholar. Culture and Imperialism, a work seeking to discover “the general relationship between culture and empire,” was Said’s attempt to theorize this comparative outlook culturally and systematically.

The 1991 Gulf War confirmed for Said the extent to which American intellectuals had abandoned their responsibility to criticize and expose the abuses of American power abroad. In an interview published after the war, Said roared, “The intellectual community doesn’t operate according to principles and doesn’t consider itself bound by responsibilities toward the common weal. . . . The large body of American intellectuals is basically provincial, drawn only by virtue of expertise.” Increasingly, the necessity of the nonaligned intellectual to pursue scholarship away from the corruptions of authority and the abuses of professionalism came to figure importantly in his written work. In September 1991, Said resigned from the PNC. Although he cited his recently diagnosed leukemia as the reason for his departure, his decision had in fact been sealed by the Palestinian leadership’s support of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. In 1992 Said returned to Palestine for the first time in forty-five years.

His illness did not deter him from his commitments and his passions. In the face of the diagnosis, he struggled even more intensely and actively as he became aware of the ebb of his life. In 1992 he was promoted to University Professor, the highest rank of professorship at Columbia University. He continued to teach and write, in spite of the debilitating side effects of the chemotherapy and radiation treatments. In 1993 he delivered the prestigious Reith Lectures for the BBC and seized the opportunity to emphasize the importance of independent critical activity: “Despite the abuse and vilification that any outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights and self-determination earns for himself or herself, the truth deserves to be spoken, represented by an unafraid and compassionate intellectual. . . . The great euphoria produced by . . . [the Oslo Accords] . . . obscured the fact that far from guaranteeing Palestinian rights, the documents in effect guaranteed the prolongation of Israeli control over the Occupied Territories. To criticize this means in effect taking a position against ‘hope’ and ‘peace.’”

From the beginning, Said saw through the pomp of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and the Israeli government. For a long time, he remained the only major critic of the Accords, their process, and their signatories. Negotiated in secret in 1993, the agreements were, in Said’s words, the equivalent of the Palestinian “Treaty of Versailles.” They made no mention of the end of the Israeli occupation and conceded Israel ultimate authority over the majority of the West Bank and Gaza. Even in the zones of Palestinian control, the Palestinians were granted no meaningful sovereignty. “There was Clinton,” Said declared, “like a Roman emperor bringing two vassal kings to his imperial court and making them shake hands in front of him.”

The agreement amounted to an effort by Arafat to preserve the PLO and Arafat’s own authority, which had been profoundly weakened by the PLO’s support of Iraq during the Gulf War. Said called on Arafat to resign, only to have the Palestinian authority respond with a ban (still in effect) on his books. Said continued his caustic
criticism, largely through his biweekly columns in Al-Hayat and Al-Ahram Weekly. The pieces were tough and uncompromising in their demands for clear vision and justice, stating that if peace were to have any substantive meaning, it could not be brought about under duress. For Said, the history of imperially administered partitions in India, Pakistan, Cyprus, and Ireland was the source of violence, not a solution to it. Observing that Oslo amounted to little more than an enforced policy of demographic separation between two peoples whose lives were inextricably intertwined, Said, in a 1999 article in the New York Times Magazine, 58 called for the establishment of a binational Israeli-Palestinian state. He argued that real and lasting peace was possible only if the terms of citizenship were made inclusive, democratic, and not based on principles of racial or religious difference.

To that end, Said drew upon his musical interests to encourage a common understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. In January 1999 he organized a performance by the celebrated Israeli pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim at Bir Zeit University. Barenboim and he had become close friends in the early 1990s, partly through their deep appreciation of music and partly through their experience of 1967. The two had collaborated before. In 1998 Said wrote a new libretto replacing the spoken dialogue for Beethoven’s opera Fidelio, and Barenboim conducted the work at the Chicago Symphony. Barenboim’s performance of Beethoven’s “Pathétique” and Opus 109 at Bir Zeit deeply stirred the audience.

In the meantime, while passionately pursuing redemptive cultural exchanges, Said, aware that he had entered the last phase of his life, continued to work quietly on a memoir, a work he had begun in 1994. In September 1999, Out of Place: A Memoir, a “subjective chronicle of an essentially lost or forgotten world, that of my early life,” appeared. In 1999 Said also assumed the presidency of the Modern Languages Association. Despite his leukemia (which, after experimental therapy in the summer of 1998, went into remission but is slowly creeping back), he continues to teach, write, play music, lecture, advocate, opine, argue, research, and live with the same indefatigable energy as ever.

To squeeze the life’s work of a major intellectual as prodigious and prolific as Edward Said into the pages of a single volume is no easy task. The sum total of the work defies easy condensation, and each selection bears more commentary than we can provide here. Nevertheless, The Edward Said Reader is an attempt to offer readers the opportunity to view the remarkable scope, the critical rhythms, the intellectual affinities, and the sheer strength of Said’s criticism in his role as an internationally renowned literary critic and as a passionately engaged public intellectual. Drawing on material from Edward Said’s books to date—beginning with his 1966 revised doctoral dissertation Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography and working through to his 1999 memoir Out of Place—we have been guided by a belief that a single, easily accessible book that spans Said’s career will be as useful to the new reader seeking to understand what Saidian criticism is all about as it will be to the scholar searching for Said’s own genealogical foundations and historical development.” 59

The Edward Said Reader is divided into three major sections and an interview: “Beginnings,” “Orientalism and After,” and “Late Styles.” “Beginnings” draws the arc of Said’s early investigations, both in literary criticism and in his burgeoning Palestinian interventions. The early Said is forever attached to Conrad and fully invested in all the literary and philosophical trends of his time and seeking to make them his own. “Orientalism and After” acknowledges the tremendous impact that work had on both the life and the work of Said and on the humanities in general. Said’s tone changes to that of the fully engaged intellectual, often angry, frequently profound, and always fabulously erudite. In “Late Styles” Said meditates more on the life of the intellectual, on the relationship between music and culture, on politics and commitment, and on his own life after having been diagnosed with leukemia. The book concludes with an interview we conducted with Edward Said in the summer of 1999.

There is no one else like Edward Said. His critical interventions have forced Western culture not only to confront its views of the non-European world but also to seriously assess its own ideas of itself. He has expanded the literatures and paradigms of literary study while maintaining a dedicated attachment to European litera-
ture and its aesthetics. Without the eloquence and energy of Edward Said, the situations and aspirations of the Palestinian people likely would have remained shielded from the West, buried under acres of stereotypes and histories of oppression. And his commitment to seeking justice for everyone has not lessened the searing bite of his pen when he inveighs against the falsities of the contemporary peace process or the corruptions of the Palestinian Authority.

Our own contact with Edward Said began when we read him as undergraduates, long before we were his graduate students at Columbia University, but it is through this association that we came to study under him. Ultimately, what we find in the broad variety of works we present here is an affirmation of the intellectual vocation, an unwavering belief that the rigors of intellectual thought and the courage to speak one's convictions will lead one down the incorruptible road to discovering and demanding equal justice for all. A teacher can bestow no finer lesson to his students.