

Apartheid denial: Carter's book continues the conversation

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [February 20, 2007](#) issue

Time magazine senior editor Tony Karon writes a personal Internet blog that he calls the “Rootless Cosmopolitan,” a term Russian dictator Joseph Stalin used as a euphemistic pejorative for *Jew* during his anti-Semitic purges of the 1940s.

Karon explains that he can wear Stalin’s negative description of a Jew “as a badge of honor” since he is an African Jew with roots in Eastern Europe. He also worked for a decade in his native South Africa as an activist in the struggle against apartheid.

His background qualifies Karon to have a voice in the current debate over former president Jimmy Carter’s book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. In a recent blog entry, Karon defends Carter’s use of the term *apartheid* as “not only morally valid [but] essential, because it shakes the moral stupor that allows many liberals to rationalize away the daily, grinding horror being inflicted on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.”

In January, at a conference on the 30th anniversary of Carter’s inauguration, I talked to Carter about the reception his book has received. In public sessions, he has said that the personal attacks on him have “hurt” him and his family, but to me he said, “I am not going to back down. . . . I am at peace.” Let his critics take their best or worst shots; they cannot touch the inner core of a man who believes he has identified injustice and has written a book to expose that injustice.

Tony Karon believes Carter has succeeded: “What Carter is doing is challenging a taboo.” And because he is “a well-established voice of peace and reason,” he adds, “it’s hard to brand him some sort of anti-Semitic Israel basher—although that hasn’t restrained hysterics such as Alan Dershowitz [Harvard professor and trial lawyer] and Marty Peretz [*New Republic* editor] from doing so.”

Deborah Lipstadt, professor of modern Jewish and Holocaust studies at Atlanta’s Emory University, is more polite than Dershowitz and Peretz, but she faults Carter

for not giving more attention to the Holocaust in his book (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 31).

In her book *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving*, Lipstadt describes her successful suit against Irving as a “Holocaust denier.” In her recent article, Lipstadt writes that “a guiding principle of Israel is that never again will persecuted Jews be left with no place to go. Israel’s ideal of Jewish refuge is enshrined in laws that grant immediate citizenship to any Jew who requests it.”

What Lipstadt does not say is that Israel’s manner of pursuing its “ideal of Jewish refuge” has brought enormous suffering to the Palestinian people. While she respectfully describes the former president as an “icon” whose humanitarian work “has saved countless lives,” she adds that “facing a storm of criticism, [Carter] has relied on anti-Semitic stereotypes in defense.”

Lipstadt damages her case for the historical significance of the horrendous evils of the Holocaust when she gives the impression that the Jewish narrative must always dominate the current dialogue. Her argument also continues the practice of using the charge of “anti-Semitism” as an automatic weapon against anyone who offers a contrary narrative. Her narrow focus allows her to deny the reality of apartheid in the West Bank and Gaza.

Lipstadt should listen to former Israeli cabinet minister Shulamit Aloni, who lives in Israel and who responded to the Carter book for the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*: “Jewish self-righteousness is taken for granted among ourselves to such an extent that we fail to see what’s right in front of our eyes. . . . The state of Israel practices its own, quite violent, form of apartheid with the native Palestinian population.”

Aloni contends that the U.S. Jewish establishment’s “loud and abusive campaign against Carter” was launched against the former president because he dared tell the truth. “Through its army, the government of Israel practices a brutal form of apartheid in the territory it occupies. Its army has turned every Palestinian village and town into a fenced-in, or blocked in, detention camp.”

Carter has been inundated with requests from groups that want him to speak about his book, but he is eager to speak to college students, especially to Jewish college students. So he jumped at the chance to speak to an overflow student audience at a predominantly Jewish school, Brandeis University, in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Yossi Beilin, a leader in the Israeli political party Meretz-Yahad, wrote “The Case for Carter” in the progressive *U. S. Jewish Daily Forward*:

What Carter says in his book about the Israeli occupation and our treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories—and perhaps no less important, how he says it—is entirely harmonious with the kind of criticism that Israelis themselves voice about their own country. There is nothing in the criticism that Carter has for Israel that has not been said by Israelis themselves.

Carter’s book remains high on the *New York Times* best-seller list, thanks in part to his critics’ attacks on him. And the conversation on apartheid, which he provoked, continues.