

The 2007 Irving Kristol Lecture

Introductory Remarks by Christopher DeMuth

Guest: Bernard Lewis

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In recent weeks we have been in essentially continuous mourning over the deaths of Jeane Kirkpatrick, Gerald Ford, Seymour Martin Lipset, Roberta Wohlstetter, Nelson Polsby, and Rosalie Silberman. As Charles Murray reminds us, we are all beneficiaries of the achievements of individuals of exceptional brilliance, drive, and character. When Milton Friedman died in November, my first thought was that it was scary to be living in a world that he was not part of. So too for those who have followed. But so long as we in this hall continue to congregate and collaborate and emulate, not only their memories but their wisdom and their spirits may live on.

On behalf of everyone at AEI, I offer hearty thanks to Pfizer, Inc., for once again underwriting our annual dinner, and to all of the men and women, business firms, law firms, and associations who are on our Dinner Committee and are patrons and sponsors for the evening. I wish to emphasize our gratitude and pride for the support of many leading corporations for AEI's work throughout the year--for your financial support and intellectual support as well. There is a movement afoot to treat the political views and interests of corporations as inherently suspect and in need of official supervision. Senators are warning firms not to advance incorrect views; pension funds, the accounting profession, and the plaintiffs bar are being deputized in various efforts to bring the corporation to political heel. This is a pernicious development. The corporation is the transmission belt of much of our saving, prosperity, and progress. It is the place where many Americans pursue their vocations and spend most of their lives. And it is the locus-point of tremendously valuable social intelligence--information about society, economy, and technology that is to a unique degree generated by reality and analyzed with an eye towards something other than politics.

Those who objurgate the corporation as an independent source of ideas and activism include the major media--themselves corporations--and political representatives--themselves eager for corporate funding. But the Constitution affords them no monopoly on policy debate, and for them to acquire one would be dangerous to our social climate and political health. The corporation is a vital, reality-based counterweight to those for whom politics is primary. We all depend on you not just for our stuff but for our freedom, and we're counting on you to hold your ground.

Bernard Lewis has done AEI the great honor of accepting our Irving Kristol Award for 2007. We will first hear a tribute from resident fellow Reuel Marc Gerecht, who studied under Professor Lewis at Princeton and then spent a decade with the Central Intelligence Agency in the Middle East, where he was what is discreetly called a clandestine specialist. Then James Q. Wilson--premier political scientist, emeritus professor at Harvard and UCLA, currently Ronald Reagan Professor at Pepperdine, for twenty years chairman of AEI's Council of Academic Advisers--will offer remarks and introduce our lecturer.

In the past five years, Bernard Lewis and his works have both become well known to the general public, and both have circulated widely in the senior councils of our government. Let me say this: To the extent his advice has been followed, things have gone well, and to the extent his advice has not been followed, things have gone badly. That pattern, although not exactly pleasing in its proportions, is at least gratifying for AEI--it demonstrates our operating premise that free inquiry and serious scholarship can have large practical consequences. Much more important, free inquiry and serious scholarship are singular, defining virtues of Western civilization--so the utility of Bernard Lewis's scholarship is reason for hope in what is still the beginning, learning-curve phase of our conflict with Islamic fascism.

The 2007 Irving Kristol Award for Bernard Lewis is inscribed

*To Bernard Lewis
Who has stood at the Bosphorus for seventy years
Historian and interpreter across the great divide
Sage of our pasts, presage of our future*