An American Reflection:
Steven Spielberg, The Jewish Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*

Shai Ginsburg
(Duke University)

On the face of it, the sense of discomfort, even outrage stirred by Steven Spielberg’s *Munich* (2005) is quite bewildering. Indeed, Spielberg was often censured for “infantilizing the audience, reconstituting the spectator as child, then overwhelming him and her with sound and spectacle, obliterating irony, aesthetic self-consciousness, and critical reflection.”¹ The terms in which *Munich* was censured, however, diverge from this familiar rebuke and suggest that much more is at stake than the artistic merit of the film. More than any other of Spielberg’s films, *Munich* attracted ire for its *politics*, for what some viewed as a highly distorted treatment of terrorism and violence in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Critics thus decried what

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they saw as “a shocking reluctance to distinguish murderers from their murdered victims—or perhaps not a reluctance at all but rather a deliberate attempt to suggest that all were equally victims,” as Gabriel Schoenfeld, writing for the conservative *Commentary*, puts it.\(^2\) For critics like Schoenfeld, however, the gist of the matter lies elsewhere, in how Spielberg’s endeavor to portray “the way vengeance and violence—even necessary, justified violence—corrupt both their victims and their perpetrators,”\(^3\) and how that endeavor ultimately turns into a vilification of the state in general and, more specifically, the State of Israel. In language that supplants earlier protests against the lack of nuance and ambiguity in Spielberg’s films with the accusation that *Munich* distorts the Manichean character of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Schoenfeld reproaches *Munich* as a “blatant attack on Israel in virtually every way, shape, and form.”\(^4\) Schoenfeld’s harsh words

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4) Schoenfeld, “Spielberg’s ‘Munich.’”