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JULY/AUGUST 2015 LITERATURE

The Streets Are Paved with Golden

Carolina Israelite, by Kimberly Marlowe Hartnett

by **Edward Kosner**

INTENSE_DROP CAP font_color="primary"]H[/intense_dropcap]arry Golden was one of mid-century America's great characters—a hustling Wall Street ex-con who crusaded for civil rights in his idiosyncratic little Southern newspaper, the *Carolina Israelite*. He wound up drinking champagne with Adlai Stevenson, being cited by Martin Luther King in his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," and swapping quips with Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*—a true, if evanescent, pop-cultural star.

Golden, who died at 79 in 1981, is all but forgotten, but he's worth a cameo these days when Jews and blacks are more often than not at odds on race. Despised by fervid segregationists, deemed an embarrassment to assimilated Southern Jews, derided as inadequately militant by '60s agitators and black radicals, Golden was as much tummler as journalist, the stereotypical clever, ingratiating Jew who jollies the goyim into doing the right thing. Now, he is the subject of a brisk, thoroughly researched, and mostly admiring biography by Kimberly Marlowe Hartnett. Her book, *Carolina Israelite*, both elevates Golden as a courageous, effective voice on the major issues of his time and diminishes him with its portrait of Golden as a corner-cutter and facile self-promoter. Golden played the maverick—the refugee New Yorker transplanted in the cornpone South, polemic journalist, son of a Hebrew scholar married to a Roman Catholic, champion of the oppressed, union man, cigar-chomping, bourbon-slugging pal of intellectuals and politicians. Actually, he was a Kennedy-era liberal, more committed to civil rights than the Kennedy administration but in sync with Democratic Cold War foreign policy. Indeed, Golden's prime—the years from the publication of his best-selling *Only in America* in 1958 to the election of Richard Nixon a decade later—coincides with the postwar Democratic ascendancy that died in the jungles of Vietnam.



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Edward Kosner is the author of *It's News to Me*, a memoir of his career as the editor of *Newsweek*, *New York* magazine, *Esquire*, and the *New York Daily News*. His article, "Bright Lights, Blighted City," appeared in our March issue.

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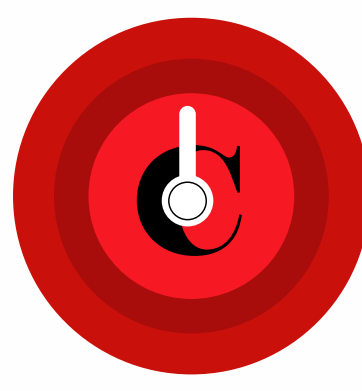
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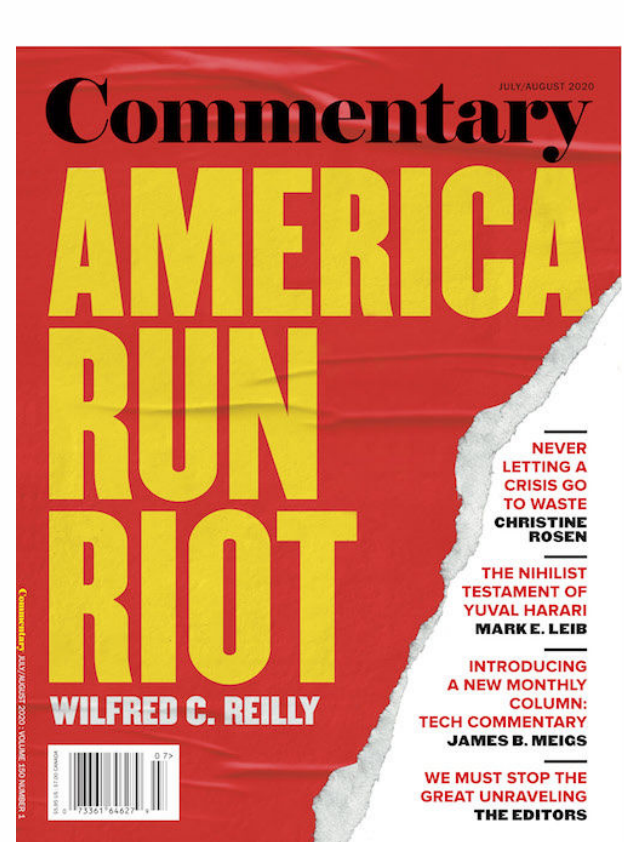
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