

How it Feels to be a Political Football

I never much thought myself as a political football, but reading all the recent newspaper articles, op-eds and social media, it is now quite clear that indeed I am. As an observant Jew, any kind of Jew really, I find myself caught up in a political maelstrom. Democrats are showing their metal by skipping an Israel Policy Conference that almost all prominent politicians have attended in the past. Avoiding the AIPAC conference in Washington D.C. is a bit like ignoring the St. Patrick's Day parade in Scranton. What politician would be so dumb as to ignore St. Patrick's Day?

The world has changed and now we see flourishing anti-Semitism from certain corners of the Democratic Party. Unfortunately, many of the so-called mainstream politicians within the Democratic Party are clearly afraid of the "new left." Chelsea Clinton was recently shouted down and accused of encouraging the New Zealand massacre at a Mosque because she spoke out against anti-Semitism in the United States. Absurd? "Yes."

Jews as a political football is nothing new in this country. Prior to the American Revolution, at the time that William Penn settled his territory later to become Pennsylvania, the Dutch trading company that promoted settlement in the New World banned Jews from the Delaware Territory. The Delaware Territory at that time included Pennsylvania. Fortunately, the order was revoked. Jews were caught in a struggle between the Mother Country and the burgeoning sense of freedom discovered by traders in the new North American continent.

At the time of the Revolutionary War, the Jews made their preference clear. They overwhelmingly supported the Colonist cause, loyally serving George Washington. Washington reciprocated with his famous letter to the Jewish community in Rhode Island promising that bigotry would not be tolerated in the new nation. Jews such as Haym Salomon were major components in assuring the victory of the Revolutionaries over England. When the English occupied New York, many of those Jews loyal to the Revolutionary cause fled to Philadelphia.

During the Civil War, the Jews mainly supported the north, but there were southern Jews who fought for "their country." Judah Benjamin, a well-known Jewish American from New Orleans, actually became Vice President of the Confederacy. A story is told that President Lincoln had his Jewish doctor meet with Benjamin to try to work out a resolution to the Civil War. Allegedly a deal was suggested but the cabinets of both the North and the South rejected the idea of compromise.

Judah Benjamin was a tiny minority within a minority. He was a Jewish southerner in fractured America. The Rothschilds in England refused to buy bonds from the Confederacy on their future production of cotton, thus helping to seal the economic downfall of the South during the Civil War.

In World War I, American Jews overwhelmingly supported their country and fought along with the Doughboys in Europe. Nevertheless, there were Jews of German heritage who had some sympathy for the other side. My father used to tell a story that when he was a young boy; "I told a cop on the beat that my grandfather was a German spy." Grandpa Morris lived with my father and the family. The "old man" as my father called him, spoke German at home. There was such anti-German fervor in the country during World War I, that my father, thought he had an obligation to report his grandfather as a "German spy."

World War II saw the Jewish community overwhelmingly supporting the ally cause. All of the males in my family fought in one of the World War II war theatres.

One of the interesting components of World War II is that the Roosevelt Administration, heavily supported by the Jewish community, was very unhelpful in the efforts to save the Jews of Europe from annihilation. Franklin Roosevelt lived during the era of John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, Adolph Coors, and Joseph Kennedy, all legendary anti-Semites. These men may have been Republicans who were not warmly disposed to Roosevelt, but the Roosevelt family was from the same ilk. As the noose tightened around the Jewish community and 10,000 Jews a day were being exterminated in Europe, the Roosevelt Administration was grotesquely silent to the plight of the Jewish community. Even Jewish government officials close to Roosevelt such as Henry Morgenthau and a liberal Rabbi who considered himself a friend of the President were shocked by the lack of an Administration response to the annihilation of the European Jewish community.

In 1944, the Republican platform strongly supported the creation of a Jewish National homeland as an independent country. In no place in the world do Muslim Arabs have the rights that they do in Israel. People as crazy and extreme as Linda Sarsour and current Muslim office holders in Congress ignore the fact that Muslim Arabs serve in the Israeli Knesset in the same proportion as the population; 24%. Do we have any such thing in the United States? Absolutely not.

It is perfectly nauseating to hear the Democrats claim that Jewish Americans need to prove their liberalism by remaining in the Democratic Party. It is likewise unpleasant to have Republicans shouting in my other ear insisting that only the Republican Party supports the free Democratic crucial American ally which is the Israeli state.

It is time for the parties to get back to the business of coming up with solutions to our national problems rather than using the Jewish community as their latest political football.

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