

A Tale of Two Americas

In all of the press devoted to Israel and Jewish American issues, stories of anti-Semitic attacks, both verbal and physical, abound. Whether it is diners in Los Angeles or pedestrians in New York City, Jews are being scapegoated for every ill in America and the world. As the Prophet Kohelet, known in the Christian world as Ecclesiastes, said, "Nothing is new under the sun." Nevertheless, America is not a place where bigotry can or should ever be condoned. No group, race, religion, color, creed, whatever, should have to fear physical violence or constant attacks in the media. Jews in America, of course, have faced their ups and downs. While we supported and fought in the American Revolution, that was quickly forgotten by the next generation of anti-Semites. A Jewish American Commodore, Uriah P. Levy, helped rid the Mediterranean of the Barbary Pirates, freeing that part of the world from the grip of Islamic terrorism. For that achievement, the chapel at the Naval Academy at West Point is named after him.

One of the early American battleships, The USS Frigate Philadelphia, was captured by Libya after it declared war on the United States in May of 1801. In an act of remarkable heroism, Edward Preble and Stephen Decatur raided Tripoli Harbor and blew up the captured ship. They also inflicted tremendous damage on the city's considerable defenses. The remarkable chutzpa of the Americans was applauded by none other than Admiral Lord Nelson and Pope Pius VII.

America's political envoys to Mediterranean, themselves founders of America, were fully conversant with fundamentalist Islamic terrorism and the price that Europe and America had to pay in order to rid themselves of the implacable disease. That was America's first, but not it's last, dance with the devil.

While Jewish Americans supported every one of those American efforts right through the War of 1812, the Civil War, World War I and World War II, not to mention more recent adventures, what one writer has called "Judah's tearful eyed race" nevertheless have faced more than its fair share of bigotry in this country. The new left – "Progressive" is the wrong word for them – with their Stalinist-like approach, has renewed the ugly specter of anti-Semitism in this country.

As I recently relayed to a Supreme Court Justice, the word "progressive" is an oxymoron. There is nothing "progressive" about the left wing of the Democratic Party. It is a word stolen from the early part of the 20th Century, when Teddy Roosevelt's wing of the Republican Party were designated as "progressives." The Progressive Republican Party fought for reconstruction, the rights of former slaves in America, and to bring corporate tycoons into line so that they did not monopolize the American economic system. The progressive wing of the Republican Party was a tremendously influential and important component in this country's successful development into a great nation.

The appropriation of the word "progressive" is like the theft of many other terms. There was only one "Holocaust", and although there have been plenty of terrible acts of discrimination, hate and murder, there was and will forever be only one mass murder of Europe Jewry, and that is the Holocaust.

There is another side to America. On Shabbat I find myself walking sometimes 9 miles to and from Synagogue wearing my Kipa. Virtually everyone that I meet or run into is friendly and some people wave, smile and shout to me "Shabbat Shalom." I always wave back and wish those people a good day. The majority of Americans are fine people who respect others and simply want a culture which is just and fundamentally kind. We see acts of decency every single day. I was in Lowe's trying to lift a heavy bag and a man rushed and lifted the bag for me and put back the gravel that I did not want. One day I was putting something heavy in my trunk, and a young man ran over to help. Acts of kindness are seen throughout our nation, including our big cities.

Recently I was talking with a woman who is running for political office. She told me that she thought she had an advantage because she is a Black female Republican. She is a very wonderful person, and I intend to support her. I said to her one thing, however, in our last conversation: "I realize that for the public you have to talk about your skin color and gender but, as between the two of us, please understand that it does not mean a darn thing to me. I am supporting you because I think you are the most qualified. Can we have a deal that, at least between the two of us, I am not going to hear anything further about the fact that you are a woman and a Black person?" She said "yes", and she then thanked me.

The day may never come that we are beyond the fear and anxiety which leads to bigotry. No doubt it is part of the human condition, just as fear is one of the ways that the human species has survived. What the human race has done is to distort fear that can be a salvation into xenophobia based upon irrelevant differences.

We need to fight with all of our strength those elements within our own being and society which lead to violence and discrimination. By the same token, we need to realize that America, and the free world in general, is a great place populated by a majority of very fine people who only need to be encouraged in pursuit of the ideal based upon simple respect for our fellow human beings and the world around us.

CAR/srb