

Eternal Questions

What seems like an eternal question, which I am frequently asked, is why are Jewish Americans are so supportive of the Democratic Party and vote for politicians who oftentimes are anathema to the interest of Jewish Americans? Even more often I am asked how Jewish Americans can vote against politicians who support the State of Israel and support American politicians who care little for the Democratic nation state in the Middle East, the only Jewish nation that will ever survive as a Democracy in that region?

Most folks normally point to Roosevelt's New Deal and the extent to which that attracted Jewish voters. However, that was 75 years ago, and most young Jewish Americans are relatively clueless as to what the New Deal was.

The story goes back further than that. The first Jewish Americans, who arrived in North America before the American Revolution, were primarily Sephardic Jews from the Caribbean. They knew how to fight for their rights, they battled the Spanish in their well-armed ships stationed in Kingston, Jamaica, and they had a loose alliance with the British Empire. When the American Revolution ramped up, those same Jews supplied General Washington with the ingredients he needed for gunpowder, ran the British blockade fearlessly and formed the Jewish Brigade out of South Carolina. In fact, most Jews at that time lived in the south, although there was a hardy population of Jewish Americans in New York. Those Jews fled to Philadelphia, when the British occupied New York and Long Island.

By the time of General Grant's presidency, American Jews, who already had established a great tradition in this country, were firmly in the Republican camp. Uriah P. Levy, the first Jewish commodore, who sailed with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, fought the Barbary Pirates and brought soil from the Holy Land to New York City in order to initiate a Jewish cemetery in the great American port city.

Jews were actively involved in the Civil War, and Judah Benjamin ultimately became Vice President of the Confederacy. Benjamin, so the story goes, and Abraham Lincoln's Jewish doctor even discussed a possible peace treaty between the North and the South, the dialogue allegedly personally encouraged by Lincoln himself. The idea they came up with of phasing out slavery, was rejected by both the North and the South cabinets.

General Grant, who became President during reconstruction, appointed the first United States Emissary to Jerusalem who was Jewish, a former military man in the Oregon Territory, and a Sephardic Jew. After his presidency, Grant went to Jerusalem, rode through the city on his steed and donated his own personal money to the poor brides of the Jewish community in that impoverished city.

Between 1890 and the 1920s, many of Jews fleeing pogroms in Europe, landed on the shores of the United States. Some of those people were religious and some were anti-religious. There were those who simply wanted to be successful business people, and others who had clear socialist leanings. The Russian Revolution at the end of World War I, encouraged many, including the poor and struggling in the Jewish

community to believe that their salvation would come not from religious observance, but from economic reform.

The Great Depression was a wakeup call to all Americans concerning the need for a better regulated economy, a robust federal reserve, and a federal government that was a more capable manager of the economy. Some may argue very convincingly that Roosevelt did not end the Great Depression, but rather elongated it through economic policies that would be rejected by any modern Federal Reserve Board. It was World War II that saved America from its economic lethargy.

During World War II, when Franklin Roosevelt clearly turned his back on the Holocaust in Europe, and even encouraged it by his own blatant anti-Semitism, the Jewish community was tone deaf. Washington's court Jew, Stephen Wise, a Reconstructionist Rabbi, became the spokesman for a great majority of the Jewish community which was interested in winning the war, integrating into American society and departing from their Old-World ways. The American Jewish community was duped and victimized. Roosevelt lied to us. We were lied to when we were told that bombers could not reach the railings to Auschwitz, when in fact they were bombing the factories outside of Auschwitz. Americans were lied to when they were told that refugees could not be brought back on liberty ships, when empty liberty ships were being filled with rocks from England as ballast. American Jews were lied to when they were told the Administration did not know what was going on in Europe with respect to the death of the Jewish community, when Roosevelt in fact had been presented with a paper from the Treasury Department entitled *Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews*, January 13, 1944. Even worse, if there could be anything worse, when Adolph Hitler volunteered to permit a large number of Jews to leave Europe for the West, the West turned down his offer! Hitler knew, when he organized the Wannsee Conference to plan the murder of 6 million in Europe, that he would have the green light from the Roosevelt Administration, the anti-Semitic US ambassador to England, Joseph P. Kennedy, and the rest of the world community. Churchill railed against the man he called the "Hun" in Germany, but he too acquiesced to the murder of the European Jewish community.

When 1948 arrived, Harry Truman became a God-like figure for recognizing the modern state of Israel as an independent entity, but many Americans forget that he also embargoed arms to Israel. That meant Israel had nothing to fight with except the blood of the Jewish community. The same Jews who fought with the British in World War II to free North Africa and Palestine from the Germans and their allies, the Arab Shieks, now faced in 1948 an invasion from six Arab countries well-armed by the British Empire. The Jews had nothing except arms that they could smuggle from Eastern Europe and from France. The great Allied powers which benefited from brave Jewish fighters in World War II, turned their backs on those same men and women who managed to barely hold on to a tiny strip of land in the 1948 war of extermination against the Jewish state.

So why it that so many American Jews swallowed hook, line and sinker the propaganda of Rabbi Stephen Wise and his emissaries, instead of the truth? The truth was available. The so-called Berguson Group, Ben Hecht and many others held rallies in Madison Square Garden, took out full-page ads in the New York Times, made movies

and dramas about what was happening to the Jews in Europe. They protested the failure of the Roosevelt Administration to do what they could have done to prevent the Holocaust. The 1944 Republican Platform railed against Roosevelt and the Democratic Party. Somehow Americans missed all that opposition to Roosevelt. The Jewish community, desirous of assimilating into the American power structure, likewise remained dormant and willing sycophants of the unholy alliance between Rabbi Wise and Franklin Roosevelt.

That is the historical basis, but unfortunately it exists to this day. Those who strongly support the State of Israel, Jewish survival in the world and who fight anti-Semitism are often characterized as right-wing crazies. There is a left-wing motif that assimilation and Jewish observance along with the State of Israel is somehow old world, passe and not in keeping with modern American values. Anti-Semitism is one of the last remaining acceptable prejudices.

Recently, in representing a client before the Equal Opportunity Commission, I was asked twice by the examiner why it is discriminatory for a federal agency to require an observant Jew to attend exams and training on a Saturday. "What is discriminatory about that" she asked? After explaining it to her twice, it was clear that the examiner had not a clue as to what it meant to be a Jew, to be observant, and at the same time be a loyal dedicated American entitled to enjoy the fruits of our great Democracy.

It is time for the Jewish community to wake up, become truly more diverse, and to give up the role of lapdog to any particular politician or political group that in no way will answer to the needs and survival of the Jewish community. Jewish Americans need to support politicians who can be trusted to advocate for the existence of a viable Jewish state in the Middle East and a robust diverse American Jewish community on our continent.

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