

Black Lives Matter

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Black Lives Matter indeed, and so they ought to, all the more for what they have had to endure. But the organization, however noble and justified its beginnings, is in serious danger of marginalizing and undermining itself. For the sake of its cause, I hope it does not fall further into a political trap.

There can be no doubt that black human beings, as well as many others, both of color and of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, have been treated atrociously in the USA (and almost everywhere else in the world, regardless of political or religious creed). For all the moral piety of the Declaration of Independence that declared, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," it took a bloody civil war to abolish slavery.

It was not until President Lyndon B. Johnson helped secure the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (we can argue about Eisenhower), making racial discrimination and segregation illegal, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which abolished the poll tax and other means of keeping blacks and poor people from voting, that the USA began to take the noble sentiments seriously.

Despite all this and the fact that a portion of the black population has reached the pinnacles of American society, large numbers of black (and other) citizens remain confined to poor areas with substandard education, housing, and employment. A disproportionate number of blacks sit in American jails, and systemic prejudice remains endemic in pockets throughout the country. Some police forces have a terrible record of discrimination, and poor areas suffering from contamination, like Flint, have been ignored (and sadly there are plenty of other examples of contaminated water across the US that have not been addressed). Clearly neither money, nor access to local government (Baltimore's administration is almost entirely black), nor affirmative action have resolved what seems to be an intractable problem.

Is there a solution? I cannot think of one. I was brought up in a different culture, one that admittedly believed that self-help was the only way. But then Jews could always hide their identity if they chose to, and most did. Doctrinaire socialism has not found a solution other than blaming others. On the contrary, too often trade unions hold back progress in all these areas, either out of political correctness or vested interest in preserving their power bases and privileges.

That is why the only solution I see is for those who care to speak out, to campaign, to agitate peacefully against prejudice wherever it occurs.

But Black Lives Matter is in danger, unless it wakes up, of becoming another left-wing, political, ideological, lunatic fringe as guilty of prejudice and

close-mindedness as any other special interest sector of American society, precisely because it has fallen into bed with crackpot extremists who have pushed it to adopt ideological lies that only prove it is just as politicized as those it claims to speak out against. And politicization only holds back progress. No better example exists than that of civil rights campaigner Al Sharpton, who for all his noise, bluster, and publicity for more than fifty years has achieved bubkas other than self-promotion and wealth.

There is a wider coalition (which Black Lives Matter has allied itself with), called The Movement for Black Lives, which has expanded its remit to deal with universal examples of prejudice and discrimination that it blames on American imperialism. Nothing, you notice, against oppression of human rights by other states, religions, and races. In its manifesto, published on August 1, it pokes its nose into the Israel-Palestine conflict and uses terms that are not only deceitful, but plain and simply wrong. Its motive can only be to ally itself with myopic ideological left-wing ideology with closed minds, and those, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who deny Jews equal rights. You will notice that they say nothing about Indian occupation of Muslim Kashmir.

They claim that the occupation of Palestinian territory is only due to Israeli intransigence and white Imperialism and everything wrong in the Middle East is America's fault for supporting Israel. They repeat the tropes of black anti-Semites such as Louis Farrakhan and Malcolm X who thought that Israel was the sole aggressor, rather than an expression of a persecuted people for home rule (support them when they are victims, reject them when they are not). They erroneously think that blacks have more in common with Muslims than with Christians and ignore the fact that Muslim traders were more responsible for slavery, both in time and numbers. And that most slaves were sold to the Americas by black African chieftains for personal gain. Sadly, everyone's hands were sullied by that inhuman trade to some degree, and to pick on only one to blame is simply historical ignorance, if not rabble-rousing prejudice. Unfortunately, this spurious black narrative has infected a whole generation, including novelist Toni Morrison, bestseller Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Bernie Sanders supporters who blame Israel for everything you care to mention.

It is applying terms like apartheid or genocide to Israel's attempts to protect itself (while waiting for a negotiated peace agreement, having relinquished the occupation of Gaza) that betrays prejudice, whether it comes from Jew or non-Jew, black or white. Genocide means destroying a people, but under Israel the Palestinian population has risen not fallen. No mass graves of executed civilians or gassed populations have been found, whereas all this is common place amongst its declared enemies.

If Black Lives Matter is dedicated to removing discrimination in the USA, we should support it wholeheartedly and campaign for it. But if, like the UN, it allies itself uncritically with movements that have political agendas like The Movement of Black Lives, which sticks its nose uncritically into other complicated and complex conflicts, coming down on one side only, I will accuse it of dishonesty, prejudice, and malign intent. It will be in danger of becoming just another corrupt, self-serving political movement. If it continues to support The Movement for Black Lives, it will wither on its own

vine.