

# **“To demean themselves as good citizens”, American Jewish Insecurity and BDS**

By Jerry Klinger



George Washington

*The battered Jewish wife syndrome –*

*“If I cook his dinner better, he will not hit me.”*

George Washington, the first President who is increasingly PC reviled because he owned slaves, wrote to the Jewish community of Newport, R.I. in 1790.

“For happily the Government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.”

America is the most extraordinary place for Jewish life in the world outside of Israel. Jews are free in America to be Jews or not be Jews. America has given the Jew freedom.

The price for that freedom is “to demean themselves as good citizens”.

“Good citizens”? In whose eyes?

Does it mean giving to non-Jewish charities? Does it mean serving patriotically in the American armed forces, or participating in America's social, economic and political development? Does it mean being farmers, frontiersmen, educators, religious leaders and even Jewish Indian chiefs? Does it mean supporting anti-Jewish or anti-Zionist causes?

American Jews have done all that and more to participate in the freest home Jews have experienced in 2,000 years of homelessness. American Jews have never stopped trying to "*demean themselves as good citizens.*"

Something rattled their cages in 1896. It continues to rattle their cages today...

Political Zionism; Theodor Herzl and the question of Jewish self-determination in their own land burst upon the world. Zionism, for those who wish to be part of the Jewish National movement of self-determination in their ancient homeland, as Herzl proposed, is a choice.

The simple formula Washington advised, and American Jewry totally accepted as the price for toleration, was challenged...by Jews.

America, a land of immigrants, with some tragic sidetracks, has respected National affinity, ethnic and cultural identity and lands of origin. Native Americans are Americans. Native Americans are recognized as separate Nations within America. Some have their own religions, languages and restricted National lands - reservations.

Long before the British Mandate was declared by the League of Nations, American Jews were terrified by a separate Jewish national identity. It was a threat to their own fragile sense of security. Could they be American Jews and Jewish Americans at the same time?

A little remembered, 1919 petition of two hundred and ninety-nine leading American Jews was presented to President Wilson at the Paris Peace conference urging the rejection of Zionism. The petition was headed by Julius Kahn of California, the first American Jewish Congressman. It was co-signed by Jewish Ambassadors, Jewish State Supreme Court Justices, Rabbis, Jewish social and community leaders, Jewish financial leaders, Jewish philanthropists and Jewish news media moguls such as Adolph Ochs, publisher of the New York Times.

The petition was a who's who of assimilated American Jewish leadership.

For them, Zionism was the opposite of being "good citizens". Zionism threatened not only them but Jews everywhere.

The petition had five key points.

First, they believed American support for a Jewish homeland would be proof Jews were not loyal, patriotic Americans. Zionists have dual loyalties, they insisted. A good citizen cannot be loyal to two houses at once.

Second, the creation of a Jewish homeland would endanger the newly emancipated Jews in foreign lands. If Jews anywhere supported a homeland other than their own, they could not be trusted.

Third, Zionism would never recognize and respect other people who were living in Palestine. Zionism would not protect universal religious and social freedom.

Palestine has never had any defined borders.

A Jewish national homeland would be subject to dangers they could not understand or defend themselves from, without outside help.

Fourth, *Zionism is fundamentally racist*. Racial and religious segregation is incompatible with Democracy.

"A Jewish State involves fundamental limitations as to race and religion, else the term 'Jewish' means nothing. To unite Church and State, in any form, as under the old Jewish hierarchy, would be a leap backward of two thousand years" the Petitioners wrote.

'The rights of other creeds and races will be respected under Jewish dominance,' is the *alleged* assurance of Zionism."

The foundation of a democracy is not condescending but tolerant with justice and equality for all its citizens. A "Jewish" state cannot be just, tolerant and a proponent of equality.

Fifth, Jews do not need or want a national homeland. Freedom for the Jew and an end to anti-Semitism will come when all people everywhere are free.

Fortuitously, for Israel, the non-Jews at the Paris Peace Conference rejected the anti-Zionist Jewish petition. 1918, 61 Senators, 239 Congressmen and Representatives from three U.S. Territories signed a declaration supporting Zionism.

At the 1919 Peace Conference, Irish Americans had their own demands for self-determination.

Irish Americans were and are not fearful of being accused of dual loyalty. Irish Americans do not have to prove they are good citizens of America by donating or supporting anti-Irish organizations.

1919 – Congressional support for Irish independence dwarfed support for Zionism.

March, The U.S. House of Representatives voted 261-41. The Senate too voted in support of the Irish cause with only one dissenting vote. Congress demanded the Paris Peace Conference hear the case for Irish independence.

The Irish declarations reflected Jewish Supreme Court Louis Brandeis' Zionism.

“Zionism is idealistic” Brandeis declared.

“America is full of nationalities which, while accepting with enthusiasm their new American citizenship, nevertheless look to some center in the old world as the source and inspiration of their national culture and traditions.”

There is no inconsistency between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry. The Jewish spirit, the product of our religion and experiences, is essentially modern and essentially American....”

American Jews, especially Reform Jews, organized against Zionism through the American Council for Judaism. They aggressively fought Zionism until the Holocaust unfolded its undeniable reality after War II ended, a Jew was a Jew, was a Jew, forever. The Council exists today.

A philosophic companion to the Council is the Boycott, Divest and Sanction movement. Jewish BDSers display a strange mix of anti-Zionism, Jewish self-hate and Jewish fear of not being “good citizens”.

BDS incorporates much of the five anti-Zionist points of the Jewish 1919 Petition to President Wilson. Jewish Fellow Travelers are essential for BDS legitimacy.

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The battered American Jewish syndrome.

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