

HAMODIA

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EDITORIAL

Bloomberg's Black Legacy

In an age of political correctness, it is no longer acceptable for political leaders to make even mildly offensive comments about minorities. From African Americans to Native Americans, those in the minority have learned to speak up — and those who have offended these groups have learned their lesson the hard way. Promising careers have come to a screeching halt, and jobs have been lost because of a single slip of the tongue — let alone actual discriminatory policies.

But not all minorities are equal. While an anti-Semitic comment will prompt across-the-board denunciations, that's only if it targets Jews as a people. Religious Jews — especially if they wear black hats — are apparently fair game for disparaging statements.

But more than any nasty slurs, it his actions — particularly his efforts to regulate bris milah — that is unforgivable.

If there is any major city in the Diaspora that should consider the feelings of religious Jews, it ought to be New York, which boasts the largest concentration of religious Jews outside of Israel.

Yet in a recent media interview, this is what New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg had to say about his attempt to regulate *bris milah*.

"I think it's fair to say that nobody else would take that on. I mean, come on! Forget about the fact that — 'They do what!?' — Who wants to have 10,000 guys in black hats outside your office screaming?"

In a joint statement, Councilman David G. Greenfield and Deputy Comptroller Simcha Felder demanded an apology from Bloomberg for his outrageous comments. State Senator David Storobin who is running against Felder for the newly-drawn 17th Senate District, and Assemblyman Dov Hikind also issued statements condemning the remarks.

Assemblyman Hikind put it well when he pointed out that "we weren't Black Hats when [Bloomberg] needed us..."

"When Mayor Bloomberg decided to run for a third term, he came to our community seeking favor with the *chareidi* community — he asked Orthodox, Torah-observant Jews to support his candidacy," the Assemblyman said in a statement. "Now when he finds those same people unanimously frightened by his personal agenda and aggressive stance against *metzitzah b'peh*, he quips, 'Who wants to have

10,000 guys in black hats outside your office screaming?"

Councilman Greenfield declared that the mayor's comments were hurtful to the city's half-million Jewish New Yorkers and should be offensive to all of the city's 8.5 million people.

"For the Mayor to identify an entire religious group by the clothes they proudly wear is the basest of insults," he exclaimed, and then went on to question the mayor's true motives.

"One has to now wonder if the Mayor's sudden opposition to *metzitzah b'peh* was done simply for the sake of political expediency so he could claim to be standing up to a minority religious community. It's ironic that the Mayor appears to have respect for every other religion except his own," Greenfield added.

Felder, who was instrumental in warding off a previous effort to regulate *metzitzah b'peh* several years ago, urged the mayor to end his attacks on religious freedom.

"First the Mayor moves to restrict our right to freely practice our religion. Then he uses offensive and derisive language aimed towards our community," Felder protested.

In his statement, Storobin lashed out against what he called the "Mayor's utter ignorance," and told the mayor to either "retract his affronting comment and immediately apologize to the Orthodox Jewish community, or else be held responsible and resign from his post."

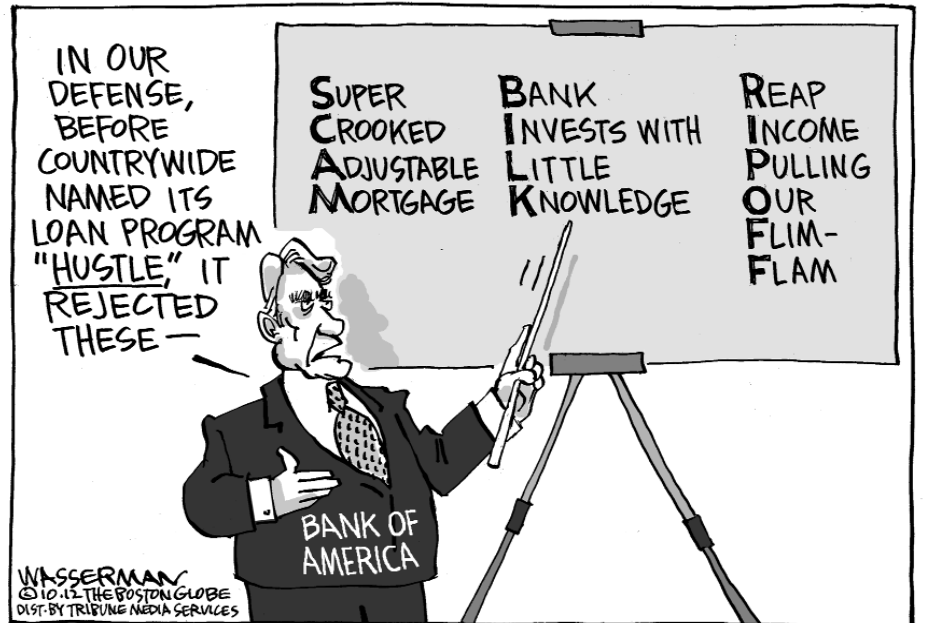
While these statements are appreciated, the silence of other elected officials — including those whose constituencies include significant numbers of "black hatted" Jews — is telling and deeply disturbing.

If Mayor Bloomberg would limit to verbal abuse his offensive against those who practice the tenets of his own religion, though it would be distressing and regrettable, it would be bearable. But more than any nasty slurs, it is his actions — particularly his efforts to regulate *bris milah* — that are unforgivable.

For more than thirty-seven hundred years *bris milah* has served as a sacred covenant between us and our Creator. Avraham Avinu performed this *mitzvah* with great *mesirus nefesh*, and whenever necessary, his descendants have willingly risked their lives and freedom so that their children should merit a kosher *bris*.

As we reported, there are indications that as a result of the misinformation emanating from Bloomberg's administration, some confused, non-religious parents who in the past were agreeable to have a *mohel* perform a halachic *bris* on the eighth day are now having their child circumcised after two days at the hospital.

This is a tragedy that no Jew, regardless of the color hat he wears, can dare ignore.



OPINION

The West's Deaf Ears for the Real Arab Moderates

BY BARRY RUBIN

One of my most fun professional memories was when I walked endlessly, circling round and round and round that hall in Algeria in November 1988 with a burly, non-sense, and brilliant newspaper correspondent named Youssef Ibrahim, who was then working for the *New York Times*.

Friendly, funny, sarcastic, and with absolutely no illusions or romanticism about the absurdities of Arab politics and the idiocies of Arab political ideology, Ibrahim's only shortcoming is that there are not one thousand more exactly like him. If he was the kind of person leading Arab countries and people they would be far more prosperous, peaceful, happier and democratic.

But, alas, the Ibrahims are the rarity, men given too little honor in their own old societies and far too little in the West. The genuine moderates accept no excuses but comprehend precisely why the West has succeeded and the Middle East has not. Often seen as sell-outs, they are the most noble and courageous of people, far more concerned about their own people's welfare than are the dictators, demagogues, and bloodthirsty academics.

These thoughts are prompted by an article he once wrote, presented below. I include the text because I want you to read every word. It is all completely sensible. Many will find it encouraging. It makes me want to cry.

Why? First, because it all could have been written 10 or 20 or 30 years ago, indeed it is pretty much what he told me as we circled endlessly around the convention center way out on an isolated Algerian beach (there's Arafat, surrounded by his coterie; there's that moronic American Jewish Peace Now guy who is explaining to the PLO gunmen thugs why they really really want to make peace with Israel but just don't know it; here come the sycophantic journalists...)

And it was published in 2006 and in six years and a half year there has been no advance on one single word of its text. Of course, the spread of revolutionary Islamism has revived the unwillingness to listen to Ibrahim, though the fate of Syria — the one Arab country he said still took the conflict seriously — should give pause to radical regimes who think this gambit

solves all of their problems.

Second, because nobody in the Arab world listens to Ibrahim or to brilliant scholars like Fouad Ajami, which is their tragedy for preferring the demagogues.

Third, because it was published — of course — not in an Arabic publication (who would dare?) but in an American Jewish one, a group that includes all too many who think the fault is on their own side and don't get what Youssef is saying.

Fourth, because if I were to have written these truths I would have been denounced with a hundred different insults.

Fifth, because if anything, things are worse today than back then. (Can you imagine this essay of his being presented and discussed in a university course on the Middle East?)

And sixth because it's now 2012 and we still have to be saying things like this! No, it's worse: in 2012 the Middle East is starting a whole new round of the old madness. The Islamists tell the masses that the only reason their predecessors didn't win total victory is that they failed to hit their head against the stone wall long and hard enough!

Here's his open letter:

To my Arab brothers: The War with Israel Is Over — and they won. Now let's finally move forward.

By Youssef M. Ibrahim
Jewish World Review, July 12, 2006

"Dear Palestinian Arab brethren:

"The war with Israel is over.

"You have lost. Surrender and negotiate to secure a future for your children.

"We, your Arab brothers, may say until we are blue in the face that we stand by you, but the wise among you and most of us know that we are moving on, away from the tired old idea of the Palestinian Arab cause and the "eternal struggle" with Israel.

"Dear friends, you and your leaders have wasted three generations trying to fight for Palestine, but the truth is the Palestine you could have had in 1948 is much bigger than the one you could have had in 1967, which in turn is much bigger than what you may have to settle for now or in another 10 years. Struggle means less land and more misery and utter loneliness.

"At the moment, brothers, you would be lucky to secure a semblance of a state in that Gaza Strip into which you have all crowded,

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