

# The Jews go back to Poland or Germany

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OK, I'm not a politically correct type. When discussing the use of the word *Nigger*, I don't say that I'm discussing *the N-word*. My only complaint about Jew jokes is that the new ones don't come up often enough, so I've already heard them all. I won't expound further on how I'm not politically correct, because such expositions are always from politically correct types.

But Helen Thomas's offhand comment about how the Israelis need to go back to Germany bothered me. Should she have been fired for it? I dunno, and I don't know the other circumstances regarding her employment. But I take this as much more than your usual slip of political correctness. To save you clicking on the above, let's go over the transcript.

Interviewer: Any comments on Israel...

Helen: Tell 'em to get the hell out of Palestine.

I: Oooo. Any *better* comments on Israel?

H: Hahaha. Remember, these people are occupied, and it's their land...

Stopping here, this is actually not controversial. Anybody who is sane right now (IMHFO) is seeking a two-state solution: an Israel and a Palestine, where Palestine is sufficiently stable and Israel sufficiently secure (i.e. not-paranoid) that there would be no Israeli troops in Palestine. So the comments so far are sharply stated but basically mainstream—until we find out what she means by Palestine.

H... not Germany, not Poland

I: So where should they go, what should they do?

H: They go home.

I: Where's home?

H: Poland, Germany.

I: So the Jews go back to Poland and Germany?

H: And America and everywhere else.

And this part pisses me off so much, I have to use bullet points.

- The paragraph above, about rational discourse, presumed that by *Palestine* she meant what we refer to as Palestine. Instead, she meant all of Israel. Have a look at this book review by Harold Bloom of *Trials of the Diaspora*<sup>1</sup>, an account of British Jew-hatred through history. [Thanks, Ms ABR of Washington, Columbia.]

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/books/review/Bloom-t.html>

To protest the policies of the Israeli government actually can be regarded as true philo-Semitism, but to disallow the existence of the Jewish state is another matter. Of the nearly 200 recognized nation-states in the world today, something like at least half are more reprehensible than even the worst aspects of Israel's policy toward the Palestinians. A curious blindness informs the shifting standards of current English anti-Zionism.

I concur with the paragraph I just reprinted: it's odd that for only this country, we decide that a lousy, blundering, boneheaded government means the entire state should be eliminated.

So our first bullet point reminds us that Ms Thomas—the daughter of Lebanese immigrants—seems to be advocating for the dissolution of the State of Israel. More in another bullet point below.

- So, where do Israel's Jews come from? Let's do more research than our columnist who regularly writes about Middle East affairs and ask fucking Wikipedia. From the Demographics of Israel<sup>2</sup> page as of this writing, citing statistics from the Israeli Census:

According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2008, of Israel's 7.3 million people, 75.6% were Jews of any background. Among them, 70.3% were Sabras (Israeli-born), mostly second- or third-generation Israelis, and the rest are olim (Jewish immigrants to Israel)—20.5% from Europe and the Americas, and 9.2% from Asia and Africa, including the Arab countries.

About 35% of all Israeli Jews are recently (first or second generation) descended from European Jews, while 25% are descended from Jews who immigrated from Arab countries, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia. In addition, 45.6 thousands (0.8%) are, or are descended from Indian Jews, and 106.9 thousands (1.9%) - from Ethiopian Jews.

Helen is obviously speaking of Jews, so we can ignore Israel's 25% population who have every right to be exactly where they are because they're not Jews. If she means first, second, or third generation immigrants from countries with lots of White people, then she's referring to just over half the Jewish population, leaving the other half ignored. Sephardim and Mizrahim have enough trouble as it is without Helen completely ignoring their existence.

There are lots of European-descent Jews in Israel, but like the Knesset, Israel's race breakdown has no majority party. The statement *all Israeli Jews are descendants of Eastern Europe* is just a stereotype, typically dragged out to bolster a story of European conquest of the Middle East.

- Hate speech always has this simple form: *All members of a subgroup have a certain characteristic*. E.g., Gypsies will cheat you. Scottish folk are all skinflints. Jews are all scheming bastards. German people are Nazis. It's always the same subgroup/character rhythm. And the wrongness is always the same: outside of total tautologies, no statement about all members of a group will ever be true for all members.

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<sup>2</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Israel)

For individual cases, you can find a cheating gypsy, or a scheming Jew, but then you're down to just defaming somebody you don't like.

Statements with the subgroup/characteristic rhythm are a superset of hate speech. You can maybe say something in that form that isn't hate speech—maybe the thing about Scots is just a joke in stupid taste—but the easiest way to make sure you avoid hate speech is to just never say anything in that stupid form.

- So Helen gets points: she didn't directly say anything of the form *All Jews are [characteristic]*. Instead, she went with a close cousin: *All people of a subgroup need to leave*. Here in the US of A, we have our own phrase with that rhythm: All Mexicans without proper papers need to leave.

The Pew Hispanic Center<sup>3</sup> estimates that 76% of undocumented migrants living in the USA today are Hispanic. Those are national estimates, and I don't think it unreasonable to presume that in Arizona, which is close to Mexico and not close to much of anything else, the percent Hispanic is much higher.

- So Arizona is saying *all Hispanics of a certain type need to leave the USA*, just as Helen is saying *all Jews need to leave Israel*. This becomes pernicious for two reasons: the first is that, if you ask why they need to leave, then you're right back to the canonical hate speech form: there's something about Hispanics or Jews that makes the speaker think they need to move. The second I'll get to in a bullet point or two.

- But Helen would retort that she's not talking about the characteristics of Jews, but about the occupation of Palestinian territories, and UN resolutions (after the one that established the State of Israel) reprimanding Israel, and various bits of international law. Arizona speaks not of Hispanics, but Hispanics who can't prove their citizenship when stopped at the side of the road.

That is, the speakers plead to legality.

Legality arguments always have a whiff of disingenuousness, and when aimed at a small subgroup that would otherwise face the sort of epithets above, the disingenuousness gets all that much stronger. Arizona, state population 6,500,000, averaged 1,000 drunk driving fatalities per year for 2007 and 2008<sup>4</sup> (PDF), well above the national average rate. But the state troopers need to spend their resources checking immigration paperwork?

Really, the recourse to law is just a fill-in, and falls apart quickly. Sample imaginary dialogue:

Speaker: All Jews need to leave Israel.

Interviewer: Why?

Speaker: Because of UN Resolution 487. Let me recite it for you verbatim.

Interviewer: But why do you want to enforce that law, out of all the laws in the world?

The only answer Speaker can give at that point—the only honest answer—is of the canonical hate-speech form. There's something about the Jews that make me feel that we need to enforce UN Resolution 487<sup>5</sup> with more vigor than Resolution 912<sup>6</sup>. They

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<sup>3</sup><http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=107>

<sup>4</sup><http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pubs/811250.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Security\\_Council\\_Resolution\\_487](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_487)

<sup>6</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Security\\_Council\\_](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_)

just all have some characteristic.

It is indeed a step from *all Jews need to leave Israel* to the canonical hate speech form *all Jews have characteristics that I dislike*. But I'm basically comfortable making that step, and it's amazing that Helen, an experienced and very competent reporter and columnist, would not have expected the listener to make that step, which brings us to the last bullet point, which takes three bullet points.

- The other difference between standard hate speech of the *all members of subgroup have characteristic* form and the *all members of subgroup need to leave* form is that the second is actionable. If the subgroup doesn't want to leave its home, then it is a call for the use of force against a group to get them to move—and while we have the billy clubs out, we need to decide what to do if we can't get them to move soon enough.

Consider what Helen means when she says that the Jews need to leave Israel. They ain't leaving of their own volition—as above, 70% of Israeli Jews were born in Israel—so ¿what is the mechanism by which the Jews of Israel will be persuaded to abandon their homes for Germany, Poland, or America?

*Scots are skinflints* is just incoherent and stupid. *Hispanics need to leave the country* does have that same hate-speech form under the surface where you can't get to it, but on the surface it is an actionable threat—it is literally a call to arms. Since you're literate enough to read this, you're familiar with examples of how the call to get some subgroup out of a country has preceded many large-scale tragedies. Is that where Arizona's law is taking us? Unlikely, but it is the first step nonetheless.

- Any time you find somebody who says that Israel is some sort of apology for the Holocaust, that person is advocating for the dissolution of Israel. Folks who don't question the Israeli state will rarely draw such a blunt Holocaust ⇒ Israel flow.

Historically, it's both true and false. There were many things that had to happen: the sun had to set on the British Empire, of which this plot of land was a possession; the millions of Jews who wound up in Israel had to want to leave their existing homes, or be expelled from their homes; the UN had to exist and OK this whole thing; the Holocaust had to make it blatantly obvious that something had to be done; the USA and UK had to maintain their limits on Jewish immigration, keeping the Jewish Question up in the air. I.e., a lot of things happened, a lot of conferences were held, and if the Holocaust hadn't happened, we don't know whether the pressures from all those Jews who were coming in to the British protectorate for decades before the Holocaust still would have won out.

The USA was founded partly after tax revolts against the British Crown, but that origin story has no bearing on today. Is anybody out there arguing that British taxes are now normalized and reasonable, so the USA should cede back to the UK? Yet I keep seeing people argue that one of the key causes in the origin story of Israel, the Holocaust, is three generations behind us and therefore Israel can be dissolved now.

Which is all to say that I don't like talking about Israel and the Holocaust in the same breath.

- But gosh golly, Helen—go back home to Germany and Poland? Do I have to spell this one out to anybody anywhere? Jews were Auslanders in Germany and in Poland before, during, and (notably) after the Holocaust, and time and time again, Jews in

Germany and Poland were told individually and collectively to go home, where *home* was defined in exactly the sort of terms that Helen used above: anywhere but where they were.

The irony of saying that Jews in Israel need to go home to Germany is just so—I can't finish this sentence. Ms Thomas hit it out of the park here: there is a veiled threat in statements of the form *that group needs to be anywhere else*, and she picked the perfect manner of putting that threat in relief.