



opinions

Submit letters to the editor to letters@thejewishlight.com. Letters may be edited for grammar, length and clarity. Letters should be no more than 250 words. Please include your name, municipality and a daytime telephone number. The *Light* will publish only one letter from an individual writer during a 60-day period. Anonymous letters will generally not be considered for publication.

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JEWISH LIGHT EDITORIAL

Can't Tell Them Apart

"That's what careless words do. They make people love you a little less."

— Arundhati Roy, *"The God of Small Things"*

What's the difference between Donald Trump using words to castigate a world community of a billion people, and Hands Up United using words to label a local progressive rabbi as a "real terrorist" and in support of "genocide"?

Other than scale, there's basically no difference. Both are distorting truths by using fear and hate to advance their political agendas.

The Trump approach, suggesting he'd keep out all Muslims wanting to come to our nation, plays mightily on the creeping xenophobia highlighted by the attacks in Paris and, more recently, in San Bernadino, Calif. Rather than approaching the real issues analytically and firmly, Trump uses rhetorical histrionics to whip his supporters into an "us versus them" frenzy.

The religious scapegoating is particularly loathsome to Jews, as we've seen our own turned away from American shores. The 1939 tragedy of the almost thousand Jews aboard the transatlantic liner *St. Louis* comes to mind. First sailing to Cuba and then to the waters outside Miami, the passengers were ultimately returned to Europe, where about half became victims of the Holocaust.

Set aside for the moment that Trump's proposal, as acknowledged by a variety of experts, is almost surely violative of the U.S. Constitution. Ignore that it comes during the throes of a political campaign. Focus instead on its pernicious labeling of all within a religious group for the sins of an infinitesimal portion of that group.

Local Islamic leaders, including those who have worked arm in arm with the Jewish community, have lambasted the actions of the California murderers. "Our faith is being misinterpreted, and I would say abused and manipulated by these terrorists," said Dr. Ghazala Hayat, with the Islamic Foundation of Greater St. Louis," as quoted on ksdk.com.

But Hayat also gave fair warning about the dangers inherent in words like those of Trump. "We are strengthening the terrorist organization. They can use the statement of one of these politicians to say 'See, the west is at war with Islam.' And you can radicalize many people there, and unfortunately here," said Hayat.

The risk of destroying effective bridges through negligent rhetoric is similarly inherent in the treatment given by the Hands Up United social media sites to local Rabbi Susan Talve (see story on Page

One). Referring to her as a "real terrorist" and supporter of "genocide" renders those words essentially meaningless.

Anyone who would have taken that time would know that Talve has invested her life in building bridges. Between religious groups, Jews, Christians, Muslims and others. Between ethnic, racial and cultural groups. Between haves and have nots. Her commitment to social justice knows no bounds. For years prior to Ferguson, she was in the forefront of social justice advocacy, striving for a fairer, most just, more progressive, less biased St. Louis.

And then there are the Israel-Palestine issues. Talve's been accused on the Hands Up United sites and by others as acting contrary to the interests of Palestinians. Yet anyone who would have taken the time knows that she has been devoted to promoting peace, fairness and equality, to solutions that respect not just Jews, not just Palestinians, but Arabs, Bedouins, Ethiopians, everyone involved in the Middle Eastern and Israeli landscape. Her involvement in rabbinical and other groups advocating for a just peace (sometimes in ways we haven't agreed with) is substantial and her social justice bona fides, whether at home or abroad, unquestionable.

You would know this if you took the time to read, learn, understand and appreciate the context of the past. A few minutes searching her involvement in progressive Israeli causes would confirm the same.

The problem with the current cacophony is that people and groups, like Trump and Hands Up United, can be rewarded for ignoring the past and the facts, and using harsh and condemning words in inexact and inappropriate manners, sadly to great effect.

Hands Up United, which purports to work "toward the liberation of oppressed Black, Brown, and poor people through education, art, civil disobedience, advocacy, and agriculture," appears to have zero interest in using words in a way to find common cause, build constructive alliances and collaborate toward a better community for all.

Trump, who wants to serve as a national leader, has zero interest in using words in a way to find common cause, build constructive alliances and collaborate toward a better nation for all.

The politics may be very different, but sadly, the song for these voices remains exactly the same.



Cartoon: Steve Greenberg

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Column seems to deny nation's history of racism

Last week I read Marty Rochester's comments in the *Light* regarding the Ferguson Commission and racial progress in the United States. Although the article did point out the election of our President, and various other elected and appointed officials in our country, I felt the author's comments denied the deep and historic racism in our country.

It is my belief that the average white person does not understand how our lack of true knowledge of the history and impact of racism has affected our views, policies and understanding. There are several wonderful books, such as "Waking Up White" by Debby Irving, "Dear White America" by Tim Wise, and the YWCA's incredible program, Witnessing Whiteness, that would be excellent resources for those desiring to discover what it means to be white and privileged.

Tom Schweizer
Chesterfield

NCJW stands with Planned Parenthood

The National Council of Women, St. Louis Section mourns with the families and loved ones of the two civilians and one police officer that were murdered at the Colorado Springs Planned Parenthood recently.

One thing to remember is that today, in Colorado and across the country, Planned Parenthood's doors are open. They're still providing the compassionate health care that millions rely on each year, and they won't stop. This is an organization people have trusted and relied on for generations.

We've seen an alarming increase in hateful rhetoric and smear campaigns against abortion providers and patients over the last few months, and that environment breeds acts of violence. This is unacceptable — it is time to stop villainizing women's health care. At the end of the day we're talking about basic health care — lifesaving cancer screenings, birth control, STI testing and treatment, and abortion. Whether it's these underhanded laws — like we've seen in Ohio and Texas — meant to target women's basic services, or extreme activists literally trying to intimidate women out of getting health care, this kind of attitude is despicable, and it is dangerous.

As one of their coalition partners, we know all too well what the staff, patients, and volunteers at the Planned Parenthood of St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri have to deal with on a regular basis. They are constantly harassed and threatened by those claiming to be pro-life, and are subjected to deceptive practices by organizations, such as the so-called Crisis Pregnancy Centers, who wish to strip women of their right to choose.

As Jewish women, we stand by the right of every woman to make her own moral or faith-informed decision about abortion, in consultation with those she trusts, and we are proud to stand with Planned Parenthood.

Jennifer Bernstein
National Council for Jewish Women-St. Louis,
State Policy Advocacy Chair

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