



Rabbi Weiner's Feb. 2008 Bulletin Article

Sometimes I simply do not understand our American Jewish self-defense organizations. On the one hand, I am grateful for their efforts and successes in eradicating the barriers that once stood between Jews and our full participation in American Jewish life. I am grateful for their passionate defense our rights and work against threats to our liberties. On the other hand sometimes I cannot believe their overreaction to meaningless and insignificant statements uttered by leading personalities, resulting in much media attention, but little practical benefits for the Jewish community. We are a small people facing many serious challenges. I think the time has come for us to ask for some better judgment when considering how to use our precious resources, and our good name.

Following what seemed to me was the quietest holiday season in memory (at least in terms of Chanukah- Christmas tensions, Chanukah-Christmas public school issues, Chanukah Menorah and Christmas tree in the public square issues, and the like), a new "threat" emerged, this time embodied in the words of the talented actor Will Smith. While promoting his new movie "I Am Legend" he gave an interview with a Scottish newspaper in which the following quote was attributed to him. "....."Even Hitler didn't wake up going, 'Let me do the most evil thing I can do today.' I think he woke up in the morning and using a twisted, backwards logic, he set out to do what he thought was 'good.' Stuff like that just needs reprogramming."

With that the floodgates were open. Jewish organizations weighed in. The Hollywood gossip writers weighed in. The New York Post weighed in. Even People Magazine offered their thoughts on exactly what Mr. Smith meant and how he could have uttered these comments. Did he not know what the Nazis were all about? Did he really think that what Hitler did was good? On and on this went until our self defense organizations were satisfied that Will Smith was not the new face of Anti-Semitism in America. I remember at the time following this news and thinking to myself, (as well as sharing with others) that this was a complete waste of time, energy, followed by an overreaction over what everyone knew was a meaningless and inconsequential statement that only encourages those who accuse us of overreacting, and can only serve to lessen the impact of our collective voice when we speak must out against **real** manifestations of Anti-Semitism, racism, and bigotry. After all, did anyone really believe that of all people, Will Smith, a talented actor with a sterling reputation without a hint of scandal, criminal activity, one of the most popular young adults in the United

States of America, was some type of closet neo-Nazi? And that he decided to reveal himself in some obscure Scottish Newspaper the week before a major movie release? Did anyone stop and think and even read the words that were attributed to him? For if they had, they would have easily understood that it was nothing more than a clumsy and ill conceived way of expressing his ideas about good and evil -- and nothing more. He is an actor, not a theologian, or a political analyst. And when it was all over we all learned what everyone knew before this all began. Will Smith is a *mensch*, and behaved like one. But our organizations did not.

What makes this event particularly distressing is that almost the very same day that this alleged scandal made news, Senator Hillary Clinton gave a Press conference in the Senate Office Building citing the findings of the Palestinian Media Watch, an organization devoted to monitoring the public broadcasts, print media, and public school text books of the Palestinian Authority. On December 4, 2007 one of the examples cited was the "Hitler – Hero of "Voice of Palestine" contest." The point of this press conference was to announce their well documented study which demonstrated the continuing pattern of anti Semitic imagery and rhetoric, Holocaust denial, and demonizing of the State of Israel in the Palestinian Media. The press conference provided example after example of the dehumanization of the Jewish people, backed by this quasi governmental upon which the Bush administration, the government of Israel, and many of our leading Jewish organizations have pinned our dreams of peace. It boggles the mind.

I could be all wrong with my assessment of these events, and their real significance. I will let you decide. But as you are deciding let me challenge you with these two questions.

1. Which is ultimately a greater threat to the safety of the Jewish people?
2. Which one did you read about in the newspapers?



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