

Ganging Up on Whoopi? This Orthodox Jew Says No

In a recent episode of *The View*, a TV talk show of which she is a co-host, Whoopi Goldberg made a comment that has drawn ire by saying that the Holocaust was not about race.

Regardless of how Goldberg views Jews (as members of the white race), or how the Nazis imposed specific racial laws and discriminated against Jews, leading to the Holocaust, I do not consider myself as part of a distinct race. Neither Goldberg nor the Nazis define who I am or my identity. But then again, I do not consider myself as part of a white race. Rather, I am a member of the human race. My religion and belief system are Jewish. My ethnicity is Jewish and I come from a largely eastern European background, where my ancestors were forced into diaspora during one of the many conquests of the land of Israel, which makes me originally Middle Eastern and Semitic. But that's for another conversation. The fact that some of us are Black, whether Ethiopian or Jews by choice, also undermines Goldberg's simplistic view of it being racial. It's a bit unfounded to think that one can convert to become part of another race.

My view on Goldberg's statement is different from many in the Jewish community (in particular but not exclusively) that she did something egregiously wrong. She may be a talented actress and comedian, but I don't particularly care about what she has to say on political or social issues, particularly about those in which she has no expertise. Being famous does not make her qualified on things like the Holocaust, about which she had the misfortune to opine.

For most of my career, I have had the privilege to work with Christians, building bridges based on the things that we have in common, specifically the God of Israel, the people of

Israel, the land of Israel and the state of Israel. To be sure, there are many things about which we disagree. But that's also the case with how I feel about many other Jews who hold different religious and social outlooks. So I live very comfortably with a paradox that sometimes appears incongruous.

Among the things I have learned in this relationship is that despite all these foundational things about which we share tremendous common ground, we do so from different perspectives through a different prism. That's totally normal. It doesn't mitigate the genuine love and support from many Christian friends all over the world. That's rock-solid and sincere. But I have also learned that many of these people who are our best friends often don't know a lot about Jews, Judaism, what we believe and why we believe it, our practices and our history.

I have learned that our worldviews are colored by the experiences we have in the course of our lives. That's isn't rocket science; it's very basic sociology. My worldview is shaped because of how I grew up, my family history and that of my people, all rooted in a distinct faith system. Others who have different experiences look at the world differently.

That's the issue with Goldberg's comments. Despite adopting the stage name "Goldberg," she looks at the world through the perspective of Caryn Johnson, a Black woman born in the United States in 1955. How could she not? If she were really a Goldberg, it's more than likely that one of her parents, or at least one of her grandparents, would have been Holocaust survivors who lost most of their family as the Nazis and their accomplices murdered six million of us, one-third of the Jewish people. If she were really a Goldberg, the Holocaust would be part of her ethnic DNA, not just about evil white people murdering other white people.

I don't blame Goldberg for her view, and I don't particularly criticize her for it. Is it insensitive? Sure. Should she open her mouth and speak about things that she really doesn't know

about? Probably not, unless she doesn't mind putting her foot in it. Should she have apologized, even if she seemed to walk that back a little bit immediately afterward? Maybe that's nice and will unruffle some feathers. But just as I don't particularly care about what she thinks, her apology doesn't mean much either. People are evaluating the sincerity of her apology, saying that if it is sincere, she deserves a pass. And if it's not sincere enough, then she should be suspended (or fired) from *The View*, which ABC has done.

Goldberg is an actress. She has lots of money. Maybe she was sincere. But maybe she called her publicist and said, "Bail me out," and the publicist wrote a statement which she used, playing just another role among any number of roles that she has played. So no, I don't particularly care about what she said or her apology.

I look at all this as an opportunity. When she's reinstated to *The View*, I'd love to go back and talk with her about it. I have no reason to believe that despite her adopted name, Goldberg, she is antisemitic. I don't believe her comments were made out of anything other than ignorance for which she cannot be faulted. Because she grew up as Caryn Johnson; that's her worldview.

If Goldberg cares, there's a lot she can do to reframe the whole conversation. Organizations that ganged up on her like the Anti-Defamation League make a living on branding antisemitism and the Holocaust. But Goldberg can access anyone she wants to learn more and avoid silly and offensive comments in the future. This can be an important teaching moment. I volunteer. Albeit not a Goldberg, I can share my view, my family history and how my Jewish relatives were butchered for being Jews, regardless of whether the Nazis considered us a race, or she considers us just a subset of white people.

In college, I had a job working in the kosher kitchen as part of the campus food services. I had interacted with the other

food service staff as a co-worker, not as a student on the other side of the counter. One day, I was in the elevator with a Black woman about my age who worked in the kitchen. We had spoken before but only casually. It was just the two of us in the elevator, and she turned to me and asked if I date outside my race. I didn't realize she was hitting on me. I don't recall what I replied. But I remember being puzzled about what she meant. Did she refer to my race because of the color of my skin, or because I was identifiable as a Jew? I never knew.

I'll give Goldberg a pass and hope that this becomes a teaching moment, especially because she views the issue of race as a Black woman, and conveniently because this is also Black History Month. Let's dialogue and learn from one another, not shoot first and ask questions later. That's my view. {eoa}

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He is president of the Genesis 123 Foundation, which builds bridges between Jews and Christians and writes regularly for a variety of prominent Christian and conservative websites. Inspiration from Zion is the popular webinar series and podcast that he hosts. He can be reached at InspirationfromZion@.

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