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American Jews and Arabs should join to fight prejudice

There have been two recent flaps about prejudice against Jews and prejudice against Arabs. One involved Joseph Sobran, a nationally syndicated and often anti-Israel columnist appearing in some Bay Area newspapers. He recently complained that *The New York Times* is controlled by the Zionists; and that the Jews have always been hostile to Christians.

The other case involved a book which describes Arabs as characteristically lazy and irresponsible. That book was sent by an unauthorized individual to a number of San Francisco public schools; it was not used, but caused a furor nonetheless.

William Buckley, the publisher of the *National Review* for which Sobran writes, dissociated himself from Sobran's remarks, and said that Jews were right to take exception.

He noted, "Ethnic sensitivities vary... In respect of American Jews, the sensitivity is of an extremely high order, and for the best of reasons... The structure of prevailing taboos respecting Israel and the Jews is welcome. The age calls for hypersensitivity to anti-Semitism, against a lackadaisical return to the blase conventions of the pre-war generation, which in one country led to genocidal catastrophe."

Buckley is saying that the Jews have a lot to be sensitive about. And, in this country, so do the Arabs, who are constantly portrayed as oily, hook-nosed villains in cartoons and



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films. So they object to a book containing similar stereotypes being placed in the schools their children attend.

For the most part, the Jews in this community and their fellow-citizens of Arab descent are not going to agree on much about the Middle East — not until our counterparts in the Middle East come to some agreement. We are free to vehemently attack each other's positions, it would be dumb for us to attack each other with stereotypes and bigotry.

In the first place, it would be dumb because it is self-defeating. The pro-Israel forces in this country, for example, have a good rational case for the support of Israel. If they use anti-Arab bigotry, they weaken the case for Israel. And Americans will respond by becoming more suspicious of Israel, and more supportive of the Arab cause.

Thus, Israel's cause suffered when those books were sent to the San Francisco public schools. Israel's cause also suffered when the office of the Arab American Anti-Discrimination

Committee was bombed in Southern California, whoever did it. And Israel's cause gains whenever Sobran attacks Israel in an anti-Semitic vein.

But there are other practical reasons for avoiding the use of bigotry. If the time comes when we can't engage in passionate disagreement without losing our civility, however icy, then all will be lost. American Jews will be in trouble along with the cause of Israel. And so will American Arabs.

As a matter of fact, that is an issue on which American Jews and Arab Americans should be able to make common cause. Did you read the news stories about the neo-Nazi types who want to set up an "Aryan nation" in the United States? They would expel, among others, all those of Jewish or Arab descent.

Perhaps, without abandoning their passionate differences, American Jews and Arab Americans should join together to fight their common enemies.

You should note that Jewish and Arab American organizations are already fellow members of a mayor's council against bigotry in San Francisco. On a good day, that council would oppose the excesses in both Sobran's column and in that book which was sent to the San Francisco schools.

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