



Espying the Jew

(Published in *National Review*, August 28, 2006)

[Mark Steyn](#)

Colaboraciones n° 1221

September 20, 2006

Earlier this year, I chanced to be at a public meeting with the great Caroline Glick of *The Jerusalem Post*. Afterwards, a gentlemen from the audience casually made some allusion to some or other aspect of the Jewish calendar, at which I looked momentarily befuddled. And so Caroline helpfully explained to him that “Mark’s not a Jew but he plays one on TV.”

By which she meant that, as I publicly “defend” Israel (which is, in itself, a curious formulation that implicitly accepts its enemies’ framing of the debate - that the issue is the legitimacy of the Zionist Entity) and as I have a suspiciously Jewish sounding name, I’ve been routinely assumed, at least since 9/11, to be a Jew. I’m honored to be so mistaken. And, in truth, even if I weren’t, there’s not much I can do

about it. Someone asked me on the radio in Australia, two-thirds into a long, long discussion, about how Jewish I was, and I answered that the last Jewish female in my line was one of my paternal great-grandmothers, both my grandmothers were Catholic, and I filled in a bit of remaining family background for the two or three Aussies who hadn’t yet expired from total boredom.

And, of course, I’d only been off the air for ten minutes before I was deluged with e-mails triumphantly announcing, “Ah-ha, something to hide, have we, Steyn? Or should I say Stein? Or is it Goldstein? Why so defensive about being Jewish, eh? How come you don’t have the guts to declare your Jewishness every time you write about Israel? Or do your Jewish media masters

encourage you to lie to your readers?"

I didn't know I was hiding it. There's a couple of FAQs about it on the biographical page of my website - "But why not on the home page, Goldsteinberg, eh? Something to be ashamed of, is it?" - and, given the number of columns I've published about Israel since 2001, it would be a bit clunky to have to explain it every time. I did think of writing back to my correspondents wondering if they could suggest a convenient shorthand - a yellow star next to the byline, maybe.

But I realized, in fact, that this cheap crack would be doing the Third Reich an injustice. Even the Nuremberg Laws would have cut me more slack than my Internet chastisers: "Article Five Section One: A Jew is an individual who is descended from at least three grandparents who were, racially, full Jews." Under the 1935 German laws on race, I would have qualified as a bona fide citizen of the Reich. But the cyber-enforcers among my readers run a tighter ship than the Fuhrer. Half my mail reads like some ancient Woody Allen pick-up line: Have you got a little Jew in you? Would you like one?

Nick Cohen, of *The Observer* in London, found himself in a similar situation. Pre-9/11, I always thought of him as an Old Labour leftie - ie, well to the left of Tony Blair. But he knew enough about the Iraqi victims of Saddamite totalitarianism to be unimpressed by the pre-war London "peace"

marches. And so he too was deluged by mail accusing him of bad faith or, more to the point, bad blood:

I typed out a reply that read, 'but there hasn't been a Jewish member of my family for 100 years'. I sounded like a German begging a Gestapo officer to see the mistake in the paperwork. Mercifully, I hit the 'delete' button before sending.

So, yes, I am a Jew, because, after all, only a Jew could "defend" Israel, right? I don't really "defend" it on anything but utilitarian grounds: Every country in the region - Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia - dates as a sovereign state from 60-70 years ago. The only difference is that Israel has made a go of it. So should we have more states like Israel in the region or more like Syria? I don't find that a hard question to answer. And the minute people start arguing about going back to the "1967 borders" or the "1948 armistice", I figure why stop there? Why not go back to the 1922 settlement when the British Mandate of Palestine was created and rethink London's decision to give 78% of the land to what's now Jordan? If you propose that, folks think you're nuts. But why should 40 or 60 year old lines on a map be up for perpetual renegotiation but 80 year old lines be considered inviolable?

Well, because one involves Jews and the other doesn't. The oldest hatred didn't get that way without an ability to adapt. Jews are hated for what they are - so, at any moment

in history, whatever they are is what they're hated for. For centuries in Europe, they were hated for being rootless cosmopolitan types. Now there are no rootless European Jews to hate, so they're hated for being an illegitimate Middle Eastern nation-state. If the Zionist Entity were destroyed and the survivors forced to become perpetual cruise-line stewards plying the Caribbean, they'd be hated for that, too. The only difference now is that Jew-hatred is resurgent despite the full knowledge of where it ended up 60

years ago. Today, Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad openly urge the destruction of the Jews, and moderate Muslim leaders sit silently alongside them, and European media commentators take the side of the genocide-inciters, and UN bigwigs insist we negotiate with them. In the 1930s, the willingness of Europe not to see the implied end-point in those German citizenship laws left a moral stain on that continent. Seventy years on, it's not implied, and the moral stain on us will be worse. . .

© Mark Steyn, 2006