

## [Reflections on Anti-Semitism...and Philo-Semitism...in America--blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel](#)

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To many American Jews, it feels as though anti-Jewish/anti-Israel sentiment is definitely on the rise. We note a constant undercurrent of anti-Israel prejudice in the media. We witness vocal BDS advocates who seek to undermine Israel on college campuses, academic and religious associations, and where ever else people will give them a hearing. We read of “white supremacist” rallies with virulent anti-Jewish overtones. The recent presidential election seems to have unleashed an ugly streak of racism, with racists and anti-Semites coming out of the closet.

With all the hundreds of millions of dollars that we have spent and continue to spend on defending ourselves, it seems that it’s never enough. All our defense organizations, museums of tolerance, holocaust memorials—while obviously having a positive influence on many—have not succeeded in eliminating hatred of Jews.

While all of the above is true, it is also true that many people are philo-Semites!

In their book, "American Grace" (published in 2012), Robert Putnam and David Campbell present a thought-provoking analysis of the role of religion in the United States. Based on a large nation-wide survey as well as exhaustive scholarly research, the authors provide keen insight into how religion divides and unites us. While there are certainly clear rifts in our society based on religious beliefs, the overall tone of American life is actually quite tolerant and inclusive. (Subsequent polls conducted by the Pew organization have found that Jews are highly regarded in the United States and that significant numbers of non-Jews feel warmly toward Jews.)

The nation-wide study found that Americans feel warmest toward Jews, mainline Protestants and Catholics. Jews actually are in first place in this regard, and the authors report that the "Jews are the best liked religious group in the country." This may come as a surprise to many Jews who see themselves as an unpopular or hated minority group.

The authors do not offer specific reasons for the popularity of Jews in America. They do suggest, though, that religious tolerance is fostered by the fact that Americans of different backgrounds often interact with each other. This personal interaction serves to break down negative stereotypes. By knowing people of various religions and races, working with them, establishing friendships with them--we come to realize how much we share in common. We come to respect others--and the groups of which they are part.

By extension, perhaps Jewish popularity in America can be understood as a result of the many positive interactions Jews have with their non-Jewish compatriots. In a positive stereotypical way, Jews are seen as people who value education, hard work, good citizenship, strong family ties. Jews

are well-represented in education, medicine, law, social work, public service, government, the arts, humanitarian organizations, business etc. Jews are seen to be good people, good neighbors, good citizens.

Indeed, Jews are so popular that non-Jews are happy to marry us! The rate of interfaith marriages in the United States among Americans in general is high and growing. The same is true among American Jews.

We also must note an impressive and growing number of non-Jews who choose to convert to Judaism and to become active members of the Jewish community. For the first time in American history, we have a President of the United States who has Jewish grandchildren.

It has been pointed out that a thousand friends are not too many; one enemy is not too few. We need to appreciate our many millions of friends, and we need to continue to expand the circle of those who respect and value the Jewish people. At the same time, we cannot forget that there are hateful people who wish us ill...and who seeks ways to do us harm. Although such individuals represent a very tiny percentage of Americans, we must not ignore the damage they cause or can potentially cause.

I believe that American Jews need to be vigilant in our battle against those whose anti-Jewish and anti-Israel positions threaten us. At the same time, I believe that American Jews should realize that the great majority of Americans respect and value us; the great majority of Americans admire the strength, courage and creativity of the people of the State of Israel.

This surely is not the time for complacency. But neither is it a time for panic.

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