

Understanding Omar

Freshman Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), the Somali-American politician who made history last fall by becoming one of just two Muslim women to ever be elected to Congress, bemoans that she's misunderstood. Who can blame her?

For those who need a recap, Omar was called out during her congressional campaign for supporting the boycott,

embraced the concept of shared dialogue and claimed that she abhors the kind of anti-Semitism her original tweet seemed to invoke. She claimed that she never meant to say that Jews and, by extension, the national state of the Jewish people, control politics through their money. The apology was heralded as an example of the good that comes from

are inherently suspect.

The denunciations of her newest outrage came fast and from practically all corners of the political universe, except from certain elements of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. When House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) tried to corral her caucus into passing a resolution condemning anti-Semitism, it embarrassingly faltered. Prodded by Omar and several allies on the left, who used the affair to further gin up animus against AIPAC, what the House of Representatives ended up passing became a watered-down rebuke of hatred in all its forms, even as it included a remarkably strong condemnation of anti-Semitism.

But the homogenization of the condemnation and concomitant minimization of the direct critique of Omar herself left a lot to be desired in the eyes of many. As a result, the Democrat-led resolution was perceived as a mealy mouthed condemnation that satisfied no one.

Anti-Semitism is a serious problem. We need to call it out, expose it and condemn its proponents no matter where they sit on the political spectrum. Our community has a voice. We cannot be afraid to use it to defend ourselves, our legitimacy and our timeless values. ■

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divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. She subsequently pledged her opposition to the effort — but then reversed course and embraced BDS as a valid form of anti-Israel criticism. She found herself in hot water again last month, as she engaged in political discourse via Twitter — never a wise move — and claimed that House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy was taking aim against her criticism of the Jewish state because “it’s all about the Benjamins, baby.”

As with her BDS charade, when forced to apologize for her statement, Omar

cross-community interactions.

Just days later, Omar struck again, when she was asked about the controversy. While we may never know what is truly in her heart, her remarks offer substantial proof that when it comes to anti-Semitism, Omar is indifferent at best, or a practitioner at worst.

“I want to talk about the political influence in this country that says it is OK for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country,” she said, a clear swipe at AIPAC and Israel, one that harkens back to the tired — and frequently deadly — trope that Jews, and their dual loyalties,

Belgium in blackface

In largely Roman Catholic countries, Carnival bears a superficial resemblance to the upcoming Jewish festival of Purim. It is a raucous time of merry-making and frivolity, where pieties are overturned and authority has its pants pulled down. The “celebration” comes immediately before the austere 40 days of Lent, traditionally marked by fasting, abstinence and penitence in the run-up to Easter.

But there are limits to acceptable frivolity. Adults need to understand that. And there is no justification for the flamboyantly anti-Semitic float in the recent Carnival parade in the town of Aalst, Belgium. Rather, defenders of the float’s hateful portrayal demonstrate a familiar blindness to how easily parade organizers tapped into the poisonous anti-Semitism that Europe perfected in the 2,000 years leading up to the Holocaust.

The offending float was dominated by two giant puppets of hook-nosed haredi Orthodox Jews in shtreimels, side-

locks and garish pink suits. They held out their hands, perhaps for money, while standing on gold coins and bags of money. One had a rat on its shoulder. The float has been denounced as vile and hateful, everywhere except in Aalst itself.

Pascal Soleme, a member of Vismooil’n, the group that created the float, tried to justify the obscenity: “I think the people who are offended are living in the past, of the Holocaust, but this was about the present,” he said. “There was never any intention to insult anyone. It was a celebration of humor.”

For those who are struggling to understand how the governor and attorney general of Virginia could have worn blackface, not in the 1950s or 1920s, but in the 1980s, a glimmer of an answer might be found in the contorted “logic” of how Vismooil’n came to the idea of their float. Rising costs made the group think that they might have to take a year off in 2020, a sabbatical or in Dutch “Sabbat Jaar.” Once they

had “Sabbath Year” as the name of their float, virulently anti-Semitic stereotypes of hook-nosed Jews grabbing for money apparently seemed only natural.

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Eliot A. Cohen recalled a similar float that rolled down the streets of Marburg, Germany, in 1936. “Anti-Semitism, or, to speak more plainly, Jew hatred, is the animus that never dies,” he wrote. “Like some malignant virus, it always lies dormant, ready to wake. Like other viruses, it may be, at various times, more or less virulent, more or less lethal. There probably will not be a massacre of Jews in Belgium in the next few years. What happened a few years after the float rolled down the streets of Marburg requires no elaboration.”

And lest you think that the Aalst parade limited its offensiveness to Jews, they also included white men in blackface and other idiots wearing white-hooded KKK-like costumes. Which just goes to show that old hatreds, even in jest, die hard. ■

Letters

Nothing green about ‘Green Book’

The article criticizing “Green Book” is disingenuous (“By comparing it to Anne Frank, this man nails the problem with Oscar winner ‘Green Book,’” March 7). According to “History vs. Hollywood,” the movie is substantially accurate, except that Dr. Shirley and Tony the Lip actually traveled together for almost two years, not two months.

Although the Shirley family claimed the pair were never friends, audio tapes by Shirley disprove that. They were very good friends, and Shirley was close to Tony’s family, often exchanging gifts. The movie events were created in part from the letters Tony wrote to his wife with Shirley’s help.

Tony’s son, Nick, a producer of the movie, claimed that his father’s early racism was reversed because of the experiences the men shared together, even changing the way his father raised the family. Unlike the articles statements recognizing issues of alienation that African-Americans face every day, in this case the truth and reality changed both men and made them better people.

The movie basically got it right.

JOHN GLASER
Alexandria, Va.

American Jews should leave Israeli politics to Israelis

Once again, tiresome kibitzing from (mostly) left-of-center Diaspora Jews who feel the need to weigh in on Israeli issues (“Locals react to Otzma Yehudit,” March 7). This time it is the upcoming elections and the “shonda” of Otzma Yehudit.

Never mind the fact that Israel’s Central Elections Committee has not seen fit to ban this party. Our stateside “experts” in Israeli politics apparently know better.

I respectfully suggest that we sit this one out. Israelis are sophisticated voters whose very lives are on the line with the results of this election, as indeed they are every day. They have a choice. On the one hand, there’s a man who is accused of specific white collar crimes but whose 13-year premiership has seen spectacular advances in technology, economics, military prowess, advancement in international relationships and, generally speaking, an elevation in the standard of living as well as quality of life for the

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