

The Plight of The Non-White Jew By: Jacob Duprey.

The Jewish public at large is in jeopardy. They risk becoming as closed minded as those they oppose. The fact is that Jews must expand their definition of what constitutes a Jew. Jews are not a race, they are not genetically distinct nor is their Judaism predicated upon the fact that they were born that way. Additionally not all Jews practice in the same manner and some practices are quite different from the public perception of synagogue. Judaism is in fact a faith, a set of beliefs and a group of people who are united because of what they believe in.

Traditionally a Jew is thought of as a person with dark curly hair, long sideburns, a big nose, a fat wallet and a funny hat. However the definition of a Jew is rapidly expanding. The Israeli and Ashkenazi Jews form only part of the greater whole that is the Jewish Faith. Communities in China have rediscovered their Jewish roots and have begun to practice again. The Black Ethiopian Jews have been around since the 1600's when they fought for their survival. The Indian Jews, the Bene Israel (Son's of Israel) claim to have been in existence since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE. All of these groups are Jewish, but if seen walking on the streets you would not assume they were Jewish. Thus the original definition of Jew must be expanded to encompass the new definition.

Closer to home, Asian Jews are not taken seriously. I, as a Korean Jew, must every year explain to teachers and friends why I will not be coming in on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Everyone I meet must first be introduced to the idea of an Asian Jew. The common response is:

"You're Jewish?!?"

To which I must respond "Yes".

My friend, an Aryan-German Jew, must calmly explain to people that race and religion are independent of each other. Many people seem to believe that Judaism is a race. A common exchange is as follows:

"You're Jewish?!?" "Yes".

"But you're German!"

"Yea, well they didn't get all of us".

A long explanation should not be required to convey one's religion. This is why a change is in order.

More to the point, not all Jews are born Jewish; although the population of people who convert to Judaism is small. Within my immediate family alone: my Father converted from Catholicism and my brother, sister and I were all converted from the indigent religions of Peru, China and Korea respectively. Although my family does represent something of a racial bouillabaisse it still proves the point that Jews of all shapes and colors do indeed exist and they are asking for public opinions to change.

The school of Judaism that a person follows is another division within our sect. The divisions are as follows: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. The first two can be thought of as the traditional forms of Jewish study and prayer, the Orthodox representing the more strict and formal of the two and Conservative being the more colloquial of the two. Orthodox services are conducted in the traditional manner, in some cases even separating men from women. Conservative services are run much like a standard church service, except in Hebrew. The last two are rather different from what usually springs to mind; often prayers are said in English or members of the congregation may offer up their own suggestions. Reform Synagogues are not as formal, allowing for provocative thought and changing of customs and prayers. Reconstructionist, to which I belong, encourages challenging the old faith and improving it as an effect of time. All of these schools of thought are Jewish but the latter 2 would be thought of as less "Jewish". This is simply not true and thus we must change our vision of what it is to be "Jewish".

Judaism is a faith, a set of beliefs and values. It is not predicated on physical traits, genetic lineage or geographic heritage. Judaism is, in my belief, a set of values that gives us conscience and modesty. It is a way of life that gives you something to believe in; it is nothing but faith. A person is a Jew because they profess Judaism, not because they look "Jewish". Obviously there will always be the stereotype of what construes a Jew but this author begs for a change in what you, the reader, believes to be a Jew. Public perception can change on the whim of a single person as long as the rest of the world believes them. You can be that one person.