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Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.2.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
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To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.2.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 5 Cars 4 Walkers 4 People Fishing 2 Trucks

A good joke, when told right, can often help people reflect on a serious truth that they may not always want to hear or grapple with. One of the lines that I regularly used as I began to speak about immigrant rights was the following. "What's the difference between a meeting of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the New York Psychoanalytic Society?" The answer of course was ONE generation. It was always a joke that made people reflect on A central element of the Jewish story inside America—the apparent move from the lower East Side to the Upper east side of New York and the equivalent move in urban areas throughout this country. It was a way for people who were about to listen to the importance of ensuring dignity for workers in jobs that were often done by undocumented immigrants—that their story of origin was often no different.

The joke, like most jokes, is incomplete. It was not intended to capture the whole truth, but rather a piece of the truth in a simple but stark fashion. In truth, there are too many details to fill in in the jump from the ILGWU to the therapist suites across the country. And maybe in jumping over many of those details, the telling of the joke did a disservice to the listeners. Because it wasn't a straight line. Sadly, in telling that joke what it did, was remove the depth of the Jewish story inside America and deprive our community of the multi-faceted nature of our peoples own narrative. I have been impressed by the ability of the Jewish leadership inside this country to rally as allies in the causes now gripping America as a result of the murder of George Floyd(zi). As I have written before, the leadership of rabbis Crimmings and Weininger has been inspiring. The many folks inside our community who have rallied to the just cause of fighting racism and hatred inside this country is significant and helping to broaden that conversation to the continued anti-Semitism and the tropes connected to it has been important. Yesterday on a work call, however, I realized that my community and a certain general slice of American society not defined by religion or race but defined by economic reality has ignored a segment of our society that is undergoing terrible economic dislocation. While we might be cheered by the stabilization and even great 2nd quarter of the market and while jobs are coming back and the joblessness rate is apparently falling—small businesses inside this country are hurting and many will not survive. And here, the disconnect between the urban community dweller and the individual living in a smaller town dotted across the American landscape is profound.

Yesterday, I was on a call (it was covered by the press) with small business folks from across the 2nd Congressional district. One of the recurring messages that I heard was this—many of the jobs that sustained us inside our communities are not coming back and if they do, are not coming back quickly. For many years, Northfield Lines Busses were a frequent visitor to my old congregation's parking lot. Those busses pulling into the parking lot to take our kids to summer camp or youth conventions during the school year were always met with gleeful kids and equally gleeful parents. And the last time I rode on a Northfield Line Bus was on the last major project I did for the congregation when I undertook to ensure that two bus loads of Jewish kids, under Jewish auspices, were marching in Washington DC at the March 2018 Anti-Gun Violence Rally. Our community was so blessed by the tireless work of Dmarcos Vital in taking on my idea and making it happen. (Good staff work was something that I learned from so many and provided me with role models to draw upon for my own working reality today). Yet on this phone call, John Benjamin, the owner of Northfield Lines spoke about the fact that he normally employs 100 bus drivers and has 50 busses running. Today he has a few busses and 4 drivers—with 96 others on furlough. There were no trips to summer camps, there are hardly any charter bus trips taking place this summer or fall. In fact, he said that in their trade association, estimates are that upwards of 50% of all similar bus companies across this country will file bankruptcy this calendar year or next.

I tell you this, not because I want you to go rent a bus, but because there is a tragic disconnect between another group of allies that we need to work with and for and the story of my economic class inside society. In the transition from the ILGWU to the NYPS, was an entire generation of small business owners who ran little stores on the corners in Omaha, Nebraska and Denver, Colorado. A small business entrepreneur who bought a gas station and ran it in Denver with the help of her children. A company that made snow blowers or a person who owned a tv store. Small businesses and small business folks helped transform the economy in the 50's and 60's and 70's and propelled their children forward into elite universities and prestigious positions across the country. But somehow, we overlook this piece of the story repeatedly. Somehow, we identify with the immigrant piece of our story but not the transitional generation that followed. (We go from Abraham to Jacob and overlook Isaac) Like the joke itself—we skip too many details and thus we skew our responsibilities in facing the facts on the ground today. I cheer the important and necessary alliances being strengthened as a result of Floyd's murder and the coming to grips with the racism inside society. I also find it a small blessing that now I get to work on behalf of my own boss, and also as a caring Jew, with folks who don't have allies putting signs in their lawns and who don't have folks marching on their behalf. They are suffering not as a result of racism but as a result of economic trends that dismiss the importance of the small businessperson and see consolidation from corporate-sized competitors as looming in their future. And if it is true in the small communities---and even the large communities across this country (think of the number of independent pharmacies that are left in St Paul)---it is equally true on farmlands in rural America as well. So next time I tell the joke, the punch line will be TWO generations at least. Morris



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