

Jews Don't Count by David Baddiel
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Review by Don Milligan

This is a book for people who consider themselves on the right side of history. Indeed, the first lefty that I talked to about *Jews Don't Count* – the sort of person David Baddiel calls “progressive” – immediately on hearing his name asked, “does he mention “blackface”?” Well he does. In the middle of the book, Baddiel discusses the costume and make-up he used in the mid-nineties to lampoon the Nottingham Forest footballer, Jason Lee, in the sketch show, *Fantasy Football League*. Baddiel says that this was ill-judged and a mistake:

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. . . being made-up in that way has antecedents in a very bad racist tradition. We shouldn't have done it, and I have apologised for it publicly on various occasions since.

Baddiel goes on to point out that his apologies have made no difference to leftist attacks on him, and indeed have increased, particularly since he started speaking out publicly about anti-Semitism.

This is relevant because *Jews Don't Count* is all about anti-Semitism on the left and amongst those holding broadly progressive opinions about race. It's a short book of 123 pages. It's a polemic, a book written on the tilt, that must be read in one go. Angry and impassioned, but nonetheless, carefully and patiently argued.

Baddiel's main point is that in the current list of oppressions embraced by the left – black people, Asians, Muslims, ethnic minorities, gays, transsexuals, and the disabled – Jews are not awarded a place. Jews are not regarded as an ethnic minority or much oppressed. They are left out, excluded, Jews don't count.

He provides extensive evidence of this proposition, in which amongst progressives and the left more generally, Jews continue to be regarded as rich and powerful, and therefore cannot be viewed as oppressed, or unaccountably, as the *ethnic minority*, which they undoubtedly are. In November last year Ash Sarkar of Novara Media explained this exclusion:

The point here isn't that Jewish people are privileged or whatever. It's that antisemitism doesn't share some key characteristics with other forms of racism, and that goes some way to explaining the lack of a shared antiracist framework.

So, leftists explain the exclusion of Jews from their framework of racial and ethnic oppressions because anti-Semitism is different. Sarkar's argument is that Jews are not subject to 'stop and search' or to 'material deprivation' in the same way that other groups are. They are, of course, discriminated against, but not so blatantly as other groups, regardless of anything that's happened in the past.

However, it is no part of Baddiel's argument that hostility towards Jews is the same as other forms of racism. On the contrary, his case is that anti-Semitism is most assuredly racism against an ethnic minority.

The question in this book is why a difference in kind should equate to a difference in significance.

Baddiel answers this question with extensive examples of anti-Semitism on the left, both overt and covert, brazen and surreptitious. Progressives, he argues, adduce a comprehensive suite of reasons for excluding Jews from the blood curdling to the simply condescending. For this reason alone, *Jews Don't Count* needs to be carefully read by everybody on the left, if we are ever to get beyond Jeremy Corbyn's 'blinds spot' or defensive 'whataboutery'.

My only criticism of this work is the way in which it elides the issue of Zionism. Baddiel does this because he is not a Zionist and Israel holds no special place in his heart:

“To assume that I have to have a strong position either way on Israel is racist. Because I am a British person – a Jew, yes, but my Jewish identity is about Groucho Marx, and Larry David, Sarah Silverman, and Phillip Roth, and *Seinfeld*, and Saul Bellow, and pickled herring, and Passover in Cricklewood in 1973, and my mother being a refugee from the Nazis, and wearing a yarmulke at my Jewish primary school – and none of that has anything to do with a Middle Eastern country three thousand miles away.”

This is a striking evasion of the issue of Zionism. He is entirely right that it is certainly racist to expect Jews to defend or explain Israel, but he's wrong in attempting to avoid explanation of why most Jews are Zionists, whether or not they agree with the policies or actions of Menachem Begin or Benjamin Netanyahu's governments. However, this is a short book and it is not about Zionism. It's focus is relentlessly upon why it is that so many left-wing and progressive anti-racists exclude Jews from the oppressed ethnic minorities, which so prominently frame their concerns?

Baddiel's answer to this question is the deep-rooted, unacknowledged, and unchallenged anti-Semitism of a great many socialists and liberals, which must be frankly recognised before it can be dealt with.

I find it difficult to disagree with *Jews Don't Count*.

Read it and see what you make of Baddiel's impassioned polemic.

**See also the 'Introduction' to *Zionism* at
www.studiesinanti-capitalism.net**