

Proud to be Jewish and Black: MaNishtana

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“MaNishtana?” What is the difference? For one Brooklyn Jewish man, this is the question he’s been facing his whole life.

MaNishtana (a pseudonym) is from an African-American Brooklyn family that traces its Jewish heritage back eight generations. In 2009, MaNishtana began blogging about his experiences as a Jew of color; that work ultimately led him on a journey of accidental activism and advocacy for Members of the Tribe who feel marginalized for being minorities.

MaNishtana’s work explores the fact that Jews of color are often subject to skepticism about their legitimacy as Jews, and sometimes experience racism even within their own Jewish communities (think Assemblyman Dov Hikind in blackface last Purim).

MaNishtana summarizes his work in shorthand fashion: “This way is wrong, and this is how things should be.”

MaNishtana’s many projects have ranged from founding JOCFlock, a dating site for Jews of color, to creating the Shivtei Jeshurun Society, which advocates for Jews of color.

“I don’t want the next generation to grow up with the exact same problems,” he says.

A year and a half ago, MaNishtana also published a book, “Thoughts From A Unicorn: 100% Black. 100% Jewish. 0% Safe,” recounting his personal experiences. Meanwhile, he’s working on two new books, as well as a musical film, which he says will be “to ‘Fiddler on the Roof’ what ‘The Wiz’ was to ‘The Wizard of Oz.’” He is also first experiencing fatherhood: his daughter was born late 2013.

No matter what MaNishtana is up against, he’s confident in his dual identity. “When has being black ever been about being easy?” he asks. “You might as well be all of you.”

Renaissance man: *MaNishtana’s passions and projects also include video games and film; he’s appeared in a music video with black-Jewish hip-hop artist (and former 36 under 36er) Y-Love.*

www.manishtanasmusings.com