African American – Jewish Relations in the 1960s: Struggling to find Common Ground

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The following essay addresses the rupture in relations between the African American and the Jewish American communities following decades of mutually beneficial political cooperation. This coalition was so successful, in large part, because elites from both communities involved in the emergent Civil Rights movement agreed upon common ideals, goals, and methods for attaining these goals. Beginning in the mid-1960s, however, relations between the two groups began to shift dramatically, from mutuality and common cause to antipathy and suspicion. As this essay will illustrate, the African American-Jewish coalition bore heavily on both groups' sense of self and purpose. In the minds of its supporters, the coalition was not just "politics as usual" but a principled and moral alliance. The bitterness felt by both groups as the coalition dissolved was to a large extent a consequence of the shared – and seemingly immutable – desire for a self identity sanctioned by the moral authority of the Civil Rights movement.

African Americans and Jewish Americans involved in the early Civil Rights movement had good reason to merge their energies and resources in the struggle to end legal discrimination. Beginning especially after Reconstruction, African Americans witnessed their recently won rights as citizens dissolve as Jim Crow laws proliferated. As Karen Brodkin Sacks explains, during this period Jews, many of

whom had long been integrated into the American mainstream, also began to be systematically excluded from social venues, universities, and neighborhoods (500-03). Though the Jewish American experience had not been one primarily of discrimination and oppression, this was a worrying trend, especially for those Jews who had escaped persecution in Russia and had come to regard the United States as a safe haven. In "Negotiating Coalition: Black and Jewish Civil Rights Agencies in the Twentieth Century," Cheryl Lynn Greenberg rightly argues that this cooperation "emerged primarily out of clear and explicit self-interest, albeit a self-interest that coincided with a broader moral stance" (480).

Two qualifying characteristics of this coalition should be stated outright: first, the "African American-Jewish coalition" describes the relationship between two imagined communities. As Jerry Gafio Watts points out, "any discussion of black-Jewish coalitions presupposes the existence and sanctity of a black community. But there is no such entity as the black community except in rhetorical practice" (38-39). The same can be said of American Jews, as Greenberg argues in Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century (4) and as Marc Dollinger argues in Quest For Inclusion (11).

This is not to say that these "rhetorical communities" have no bearing on reality – quite the contrary. Once established in mass consciousness, they "actually do influence political perceptions and determinations of self-worth, both of which impact public action" (Watts 39). Thus, though the African American-Jewish coalition describes the relationship between a small group of elite individuals, the affinity between African Americans and American Jews at the mass level became especially pronounced as the coalition gained momentum, as described by both Greenberg (478) and Fred Ferretti (648).

Second, the civil rights coalition was not a relationship of equals. Eric Goldstein is one of many authors to take issue with the use of "alliance" to describe the relationship, as the word suggests two factions motivated by similar circumstances (217). Although both groups endured histories of oppression and social exclusion, in the context of the United States African Americans faced much greater disadvantages and oppression than American Jews. Accordingly, Jews involved in the movement had far greater access to social, political, and economic capital. The degree to which these inequalities influenced

the coalition continues to be hotly debated.

A mutual adherence to a liberal integrationist philosophy engendered cooperation between elites from both groups. Jewish organizations founded to combat anti-Semitism – the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL), and the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress) – increasingly came to organize their efforts in tandem with African American civil rights agencies. Additionally, the Urban League (UL) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had, since their inception, received a great deal of financial and physical support from American Jews.[1] Activists in these agencies worked within the existing framework of the American court system and later successfully mobilized mass action for peaceful demonstrations and boycotts, eventually swaying public opinion to the cause.

The coalition gained momentum in the 1940s and succeeded in making substantial changes to the American legal code – in 1954, in the landmark Brown v. Board Supreme Court decision in favor of integration, in 1964 with the Civil Rights bill, and in 1965 with the Voting Rights Act. Throughout this period, it successfully mobilized mass action for peaceful demonstrations and boycotts, eventually swaying public opinion to the cause. After these triumphs, however, a long and acrimonious process of collapse set in.

In its earlier focus on the undermining of the Jim Crow system in the Deep South, the Civil Rights movement had enjoyed at least the tacit support of African Americans and Jews in the north on a mass level. The movement gained strength and physical support following the Brown decision, but imploded from below when the movement moved north to confront discrimination and segregation in New York City, Detroit, Chicago, and other urban centers. As Dollinger describes, northern liberals – including Jews – who had supported the Civil Rights movement in the South were far less supportive of civil rights efforts in their backyards (174, 186). By this point, the civil rights coalition had succeeded in dismantling almost all obstacles to Jewish success and mobility but had not yet succeeded in doing the same for African Americans. Additionally, the shifting demographic landscape of the United States often situated Jews in close proximity to – and in positions of relative power over – inner-city African Americans

(Dollinger 187).

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the clear sense of purpose that had guided the Civil Rights movement and sustained the coalition was obscured after substantive changes in the lives of most African Americans failed to materialize as expected. The racist fabric of American society and culture proved to be far more entrenched than the racism written into the legal code. Borne out of this atmosphere of hopelessness and frustration, a new generation of activists emerged from the African American community and began to seriously challenge the legitimacy and efficiency of the strategies employed by the old guard of the Civil Rights movement – that is, the shared ideology of the elite African American-Jewish coalition. There is a general consensus in the literature that, as Joshua Michael Zeitz writes, "the rift between these groups occurred only after the civil rights agenda shifted to grounds less conducive to principled agreement between Jewish and black leaders" (2), although opinions diverge in apportioning the blame for this rift.

Accounts of this era in African American-Jewish relations – both those written during the era itself and after – are often bitter and accusatory. This is attributable to the fact that, very frequently, those choosing to write on the topic had a vested and personal stake in the debate. Many who participated in the civil rights alliance, for instance, bemoan the "lost alliance," while newly emergent voices question the legitimacy of the coalition in the first place. Those who wish to engage in this body of literature, therefore, should do so critically, as who is writing may help explain what is being written. As Jonathan Kaufman astutely observes, "blacks and Jews were looking at the same events and coming away with completely different interpretations" (7).

Furthermore, moderate voices in the debate were all but completely drowned out by extremist ones (Greenberg 223). This was the result of two overlapping factors: first, the mass media focused on the most controversial aspects of the debate and provided a platform for the most contentious actors (Greenberg 264). Second, as described by Lewis Young, especially during the late 1960s, the need or desire to maintain group cohesion along with the growing political potency of group identity and separatism created an environment unreceptive to moderate discussion (82; also see Greenberg 266). Those who

did not stray from a moderate stance were at risk of being labeled traitorous to the group (Zeitz 273). In "Introduction to Negro and Jew: an Encounter in America," Shlomo Katz, one such moderate Jewish intellectual, recounted the epithets hurled at him by other Jews after he published an article decrying the political use of "black anti-Semitism" following African American rioting in which several Jewish stores were destroyed: "'You're just another Jewish self-hater… You don't care what happens to your own people'" (641).

Efforts to explain the collapse of the coalition focus on myriad events as precipitating factors. The growing alienation between blacks and Jews in the 1960s is variously linked to the rise of the Black Power movement; the sometimes exploitative relationship between poor inner-city African Americans and middle-class Jewish landlords and merchants in Northern cities; the ousting of whites from the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); the Six-Day War in 1967; African American rioting in Northern cities that frequently resulted in the destruction of Jewish property; and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district incident in Brooklyn, New York. In the 1970s, the conflict fed on such issues as the relationship between the apartheid government of South Africa and the Israeli government; affirmative action[2]; the Andrew Young affair; and the burgeoning prominence of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. The intellectual debate concerning these rifts added fuel to the fire of the conflict. As Rabbi Alan Miller convincingly argues in "Black Anti-Semitism – Jewish Racism," many of those involved in the debate were highly ideological and self-interested but operated under a veneer of academic respectability. According to him,

> the greatest intellectual and moral fraud is currently perpetrated in certain circles by those who, under the influence of acute ideological bias, pretend to be analyzing the present black-Jewish impasse objectively in terms of cold hard fact. (83)

Unsurprisingly, different scholars in the literature give prominence to different dynamics and events when attempting to explain the rift. This paper analyzes two related political movements – the rift in the Democratic Party and the rise of the Black Power movement – and two highly politicized events – the 1967 Arab-Israeli War

and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district incident – and the arguments surrounding these events. Given the heated rhetoric and the proliferation of polemic in the literature, this paper will attempt to offer a dispassionate account of these events in the context of souring relations between African Americans and American Jews in the mid- to late-1960s.

The Democratic Party Splinters

The Democratic coalition that coalesced around Franklin Delano Roosevelt's social policies following the Great Depression included a diverse group of interests and factions that may now seem to make for strange bedfellows. But, writes William G. Mayer, white Southerners, organized labor, immigrants, the urban North, Catholics, Jews, African Americans, other racial minorities, and the poor all had a high stake in FDR's "Three Rs": relief, recovery, and reform (73-90). For three decades, New Deal policies formed the basis for this robust – yet extremely variegated – coalition of voters. Though the Democratic Party had already begun to show signs of strain in the 1950s, the mid-1960s marked the beginning of the most dramatic and long-lasting rift in party membership and ideology. The events surrounding the 1964 Democratic National Convention well illustrate the change.

Jews and African Americans both had a vested interest in controlling the message and direction of the Democratic platform – that is, an interest in maintaining their accumulated intra-party power. Despite claims to the contrary, by African Americans and by Jews themselves, and by the media, neither group ever stopped voting for the Democratic Party in significant numbers. Whatever flaws the Democratic Party had and has – especially visible in the changing social climate of the 1960s – it still remains, at worst, the "lesser evil" for the vast majority of American Jews and African Americans. Key constituencies within the modern Republican Party – especially fundamentalist Christians and virulent anticommunists – have continually dissuaded most African Americans and Jews from joining its ranks (Greenberg 208, 235).

The modern American two-party dynamic, then, has essentially required that both African Americans and Jews congregate under the common banner of the Democratic Party. This fact alone, however, does not compel intra-party consensus between the two groups, as was beginning to be painfully obvious by the mid-1960s when the

Democratic Party underwent the first of a series of identity crises. Southern whites and moderates left the Party in droves, largely in response to Democratic support for the Civil Rights platform. The Democratic Party that emerged from this realignment was anything but a cohesive and unified whole. Infighting between leftists and moderates over the true meaning and worth of liberalism prevented the Democrats from establishing a credible and consistent platform – and from winning elections. Perhaps just as damaging to the Party image was the deepening conflict between African Americans and Jews, which frequently overlapped with the larger Democratic leftist/ moderate fight, with African Americans frequently voicing leftist ideals and concerns and Jews moving increasingly to moderate positions. A small number of Jewish liberals, as will be discussed in greater detail, abandoned the Party altogether and founded neoliberalism.

The Civil Rights movement made gains in democratizing the Deep South and in enfranchising the vote for African Americans during the Mississippi Freedom Rides of the early 1960s, which, along with the Brown decision, encouraged the growth of African American political consciousness (Dollinger 181). Additionally, and as Merle Black explains in "The Transformation of the Southern Democratic Party," these gains made the southern African American vote a viable constituency to which politicians could appeal (1008). But the Democratic Party was still home to southern whites, many of whom were avowed segregationists and supremacists. Years before, when FDR declined to sign anti-lynching legislation into law, it was these white voters to whom he pandered, with no loss of the African American vote as a result. Times, however, had changed, and what Thomas J. Sugrue describes as the "unresolved questions of racial identity and racial politics" that had for so long stayed beneath the surface burst to the fore (552). In 1964, the Democratic Party Convention in Atlantic City revealed a sharp ideological conflict between the National Democratic Party and the Mississippi State Democratic Party.

Key to the Mississippi State Democrats' platform, as detailed by Ronald Radosh in *Divided they Fell: the Demise of the Democratic Party, 1964-1996*, was the maintenance of Jim Crow policy (3). The Mississippi delegates – elected through discriminatory Jim Crow practices that disenfranchised African Americans – planned to oppose all civil rights

propositions and all candidates supportive of Civil Rights. In practice, this amounted to the Democrats from Mississippi planning to oppose and condemn the entire national platform of their party.

In contrast, the Mississippi Freedom Democrats (MFDP), a group representing newly-enfranchised African American Mississippians, agreed with the national platform and asked to be seated at the Convention in place of the regular delegates. But Lyndon B. Johnson, up for re-election, was unwilling to act so boldly against the regular Mississippi delegates. The agreement reached after weeks of talks between the White House, the MFDP, – as represented by civil rights activist and organized labor lawyer Joseph Rauh – and the regular Mississippi delegates was that two "at-large" seats would be filled by MFDP members (there were 68 MFDP delegates altogether) and the regular Mississippi delegates would have to agree to the National Party platform. Additionally, all future delegations would be required to be elected fairly and non-discriminatorily (Radosh 8).

Many regular delegates walked out, not only those from Mississippi but also those from other states in the Deep South who relied on Jim Crow to maintain power. This foreshadowed the voting patterns of the following presidential elections – and, indeed, white southern voting patterns since – in which Lyndon B. Johnson was the first Democratic candidate since Reconstruction to lose Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina.

The MFDP was equally unhappy with the compromise. Moderate leaders including Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King, Jr. had encouraged them to acquiesce, and so, when it was announced that the MFDP had accepted the compromise on national television – when in fact they had not yet voted on the matter – the would-be delegates were incensed. They felt they had been let down, yet again, by the system, pushed into accepting a meaningless "victory" by moderates who claimed to be on their side. In the words of one MFDP spokesperson, Fannie Lou Hamer, "We didn't come all this way for no two seats!" (Radosh 10-11).

This event can be seen as a microcosm of the problems that would later wrack the Democratic Party. The tension was, at the time of the National Convention, essentially between the leftists – which then included a broad swathe of young radicals, many of them African

American and Jewish – and the more moderate and older New Deal liberals. The young activists – many of whom had become highly politicized by the violence in Mississippi – understood the events in Atlantic City to be "proof that the system was a corrupt blockade, holding them back" (Radosh 25). The Democrat leftists were especially disenchanted with party of which they were a part: "Stokely Carmichael…wrote that it revealed not only that America's conscience was unreliable but that Negroes in Mississippi and elsewhere could not rely on their so-called allies" (Radosh 24-25). The tactics that the Civil Rights movement had employed thus far – gradualism and working within established institutions – seemed futile and ineffective in a system that seemed to be democratic in name only.

The older liberal establishment within the Democratic Party, meanwhile, was uncomfortable with their fellow party members' growing radicalism. For many older Jews in the Democratic Party, this challenge from the left represented a threat to their conception of American values and liberalism – the supposed liberal system in which so many of them had joined the middle and upper-strata of society. The War years and the Communist threat had defined and limited the space for political expression – and the possible scope and direction of liberalism – but these rules were no longer in play. As Michael E. Staub argues in Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism, the "older generation, self-defined liberals… could no longer determine the boundaries of debate" (13). As the 1960s wore on – and for reasons that will be explicated below – ethnic and racial politics supplanted "generational politics" in terms of import for the breakdown within the party. No conflict received greater media attention or exposed the ideological differences within the Democratic Party as starkly as that between African Americans and Jews.

Ronald Rodosh argues that "it was the Civil Rights movement that launched the Democratic Party on a trajectory that ended in disaster" beginning with the 1964 Democratic National Convention (2). Murray Friedman makes a similar argument in "The Alliance Peaks and Splits," a chapter of What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance (190-212). Friedman and Rodosh epitomize the tone of several frequently cited and reviewed publications on the African American/Jewish civil rights coalition and collapse regarding

the pivotal importance of the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City in the breakdown of the coalition. Radosh, after beginning the "Introduction" to his book by describing the unknowable horrors of African American existence in pre-1960s Mississippi, goes on to take a stab at it himself. He does not dawdle long to apportion this bit of understanding, however, choosing to immediately delve into his story of the Civil Rights movement that felled the once-mighty Democratic Party in Atlantic City, New Jersey:

> It is here, in Mississippi, that our story begins, for it was the civil rights movement that launched the Democratic Party on a trajectory that ended in disaster. From a much-needed end to Jim Crow exclusions which had created a whites-only party in the Southern states, Democrats would move on to a disastrous overreaction and takeover by guilty white liberals and race-conscious black militants. From an understandable opposition to Vietnam War, to an embrace of the enemy, the Democratic Party's story as told in these pages is a tragedy of overreaching. The intentions of the early generation of activists were noble, their cause – especially that of civil rights – was necessary and just. But the momentum of the struggle would lead them to extreme positions, and within a few decades, remove them from the mainstream concerns of Americans that they once reflected. (2)

His tone vacillates between overwrought, disingenuous sympathy and chiding resentment for African Americans, and the language he uses is nauseating – "race-conscious black militants," "embrace of the enemy," tragedy of overreaching" – especially next to nonsense statements such as the last sentence in the passage, in which the movement to end legal segregation is transformed into "Everyman's Battle."

Murray Friedman, who writes that the Convention "doomed the black-Jewish alliance," is equally hyperbolic (*What Went Wrong* 212). The authors who are a party to this trend are mostly academics, and their degrees instill their work with a certain degree of authority. But, as Yvonne D. Newsome correctly points out, Friedman is hardly an objective bystander (342). Like many others writing on the subject, Friedman was directly involved in civil rights, heading two regional

Jewish agencies involved. Others underwent drastic individual ideological shifts because of events surrounding and related to the conflict or simply because of their lived experience during these tumultuous years. Norman Podhoretz belonged to the latter category, which he made clear with his 1963 article during his tenure as the editor of *Commentary* magazine, titled "My Negro Problem and Ours" (5-22). Though the neoconservative movement did not spring up overnight, many see the publication of Podhoretz's article as an intuitive starting point.

In the unabashedly frank tone that would become his trademark, Podhoretz reflects on being harassed and beaten up as a boy at the hands of African American children in his Brooklyn neighborhood. He was especially confused, he writes, by the disconnect between prevailing racial stereotypes of the day and reality: "And so I puzzled to think that Jews were supposed to be rich when the only Jews I knew were poor, and that Negroes were supposed to be persecuted when it was the Negroes who were doing the only persecuting I knew about – and doing it, moreover, to *me* " (6). These experiences – and his "twisted feelings about Negroes" (18) – colored Podhoretz's adult political feeling and made him an extremely ambivalent liberal.

Podhoretz and other Jewish intellectuals began to move rightward during the mid-1960s. They were frustrated with and opposed to the new direction the Civil Rights movement was moving, for one, and felt that Jews particularly should reassess their political and economic interests. Neither liberalism nor the Democratic Party was serving Jewish interests in the minds of the emergent neoconservatives. Many of those writing were liberals or leftists who, for a time, supported the Civil Rights movement in either a physical capacity or through print, in such vehicles as *Commentary* magazine. *Commentary*, beginning in the early 1960s under Podhoretz's editorship, underwent a dramatic political transformation and moved from consistent pro-liberal positions to increasingly conservative ones. In many ways, the transformation of the magazine mirrored the rapid and extreme ideological changes of the new neoconservatives. With the growth of Black Power and African American insistence that the supposed "race-blind meritocracy" did not exist, and as both communities turned inward, these Jewish intellectuals no longer felt at home in

liberal camps. Their prominence in literary circles, along with the large audiences they reached and the controversial topics they wrote about, created the illusion that the American Jewish community at-large was also beginning to move sharply right, although this was not the case. Though many Jews, like other white Americans, would assert a more conservative social politics, the vast majority continued to vote solidly Democrat in elections (Staub 23).

The Black Power Movement Responds to the Failures of Liberalism

A major reorientation in the thrust and rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement began to take place in the late 1950s. New – and frequently younger – African American voices, discouraged by the shortcomings of liberalism, challenged the tactics and underlying ideology of the civil rights leadership. Bayard Rustin's description of Black Power advocate and leader Stokely Carmichael and that of Carmichael's politicization is telling. It was first published in *Commentary* in 1965: "It took countless beatings and 24 jailings – that and the absence of strong continual support from the liberal community – to persuade Carmichael that his earlier faith in coalition politics was mistaken" (36). The feeling rang true for many African Americans at the grassroots level, especially those living in Northern urban slums. The narratives of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. illustrate both the shift in thought behind the African American struggle for equality and the challenge of presenting a cohesive community vision for future social action. King was committed to nonviolence as a force for social change and believed in the necessity of interracial coalition building. In particular, King cultivated close relationships with Jewish leaders involved in the Civil Rights movement and came to view Jewish support as crucial for the movement's success.

Malcolm X, on the other hand, stressed Black Nationalism, separatism, and militancy. In addition, he was accused of anti-Semitism due to remarks made during public appearances and in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The greatest offense of the Jews, according to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, was their participation in the Civil Rights movement – participation that he viewed as an exercise in hypocrisy at best and a strategic effort to concentrate racial hatred on African Americans at worst. The passage below follows the scene in

The Autobiography in which Malcolm X confronts a spying government agent with the information that Malcolm knows he is a Jew. He then lectures the agent, explaining to him that he is wise to the ways of Jewish people:

> I told him all I held against the Jew was that so many Jews actually were hypocrites in their claim to be friends of the American black man, and it burned me up to be so often called "anti-Semitic" when I spoke things I knew to be the absolute truth about Jews. I told him that, yes, I gave the Jew credit for being among all other whites the most active, and the most vocal, financier, "leader" and "liberal" in the Negro Civil Rights movement. But I said at the same time I Knew that the Jew played these roles for a very careful strategic reason: the more prejudice in America could be focused upon the Negro, then the more the white Gentiles' prejudice would keep diverted off the Jew. (372).

These themes are blatant recreations of the "stereotypical Jew" that, at the time of publication of *The Autobiography*, had so recently been used to promote and justify the Holocaust. This, unsurprisingly, did not sit well with the American Jewish community. Many Jews who had been involved in the struggle for Civil Rights did not understand or could not justify the shift from liberalism and integration to self-determination and Black Nationalism and, increasingly, Jews and African Americans disagreed over how to proceed with the movement. In a 1969 essay for *Commentary*, Rabbi Earl Rabb describes the change as "the shift from the goal of equal opportunity to the goal of equal achievement, from civil rights to the war against poverty, from the civil rights revolution to the Negro revolution" (18). In contrast, Manning Marable, African American social scientist, remembers it differently: "'We Shall Overcome' became 'What more do *they* want?'" (6).

In "The Politics of Relations Between African Americans and Jews," Clayborne Carson recounts the tendency of Malcolm X and other black militants to encourage African American isolation from the American mainstream, at least partially because of the potential power that leaders such as themselves could command in a closed-off environment (141). Writes Carson, Malcolm "sought to displace black

Civil Rights leaders by calling attention to the subordinate role these leaders play in black-Jewish alliances" (141).   African American self-determination and identity formation went hand in hand and formed the rationale of this critique of older civil rights leaders.

These contentions – that Jews had ulterior motives during the Civil Rights movement, that Jewish (along with African American) civil rights leaders subverted the cause by adhering to ineffective pandering to the white power structure of the American government, that Jewish success prevented African American success – became visible tropes in some radical African American circles. Additionally, "there was a political incentive for anti-Semitism; discrediting integration's staunchest advocates reinforced the separatist position" (Greenberg 229-30). Highly visible, too, were corresponding accusations of anti-Semitism leveled at these African American radicals by leaders of the Jewish establishment, such as those raised by Murray Friedman in "Black Anti-Semitism on the Rise" (14).

The schism in African American ideology – the shift from a King-esque philosophy to that of black nationalists, separatists, and militants – expanded markedly following the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 and the subsequent proliferation, popularity, and influence of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in the African American community – particularly among the younger generation. The Black Panther Party, founded in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, was a very visible manifestation of Malcolm X's influence. Others advocating black separatism and militancy – Eldridge Cleaver, Julius Lester, Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown, to name a few – found outlets in the increasingly radical Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and in literary circles ("The Late Sixties" 264). Some of these leaders, like Malcolm X, espoused varying degrees of anti-Semitism.

Beginning in the early 1960s, the Jewish community was also in flux, as older leaders bemoaned the "lost generation" of Jewish youth who did not engage with their religion but rather found purpose through agitating for social justice. These younger Jews continued to support the Civil Rights movement through to the transition to Black Power in greater numbers than their elders. To a degree, this was illustrative of a larger generational trend in American society. Like many other young radicals at the time, the African Americans and Jews

involved in the Black Power movement were keenly disillusioned with their government and with the international capitalist order, as Lewis Young argues (72-73; also see Greenberg 228).

The power vacuum in the African American community in the wake of King's assassination in 1968 quickly filled with increasingly radical leaders. Black Power spoke to African Americans who were virtually powerless to move out of dilapidated housing in unsafe neighborhoods in inner cities and who, as a result, were "predatory tenants," forced to pay unreasonably high rent. It appealed to those African Americans, too, who were forced to send their children to segregated second-rate public schools or who had, perhaps, recently been enrolled at any of these ghetto schools themselves. In the words of Stokely Carmichael, speaking in front of a crowd at UC-Berkeley in 1966, "Only black people can convey the revolutionary idea that black people are able to do things themselves" (1966). African American intellectuals, too, also came to support this vision for the community.

Unlike the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement saw little utility in working through established channels to effect change. The problems of African Americans were due to the corrupt institutions of government themselves, they argued, and could only be resolved by drastic, systemic change or the creation of separate African American institutions – and some called for the creation of a separate African American state altogether.[3] The reverberations of the Black Power movement were vast. Black Power advocated militancy, self-defense, and identity politics informed by a sense of one's "people," and it left little room for outsiders. American Jews, however, experienced a dramatic realignment of their own, especially among young American Jews. The Jewish political realignment was frequently and consciously informed by Black Power itself.

The Rise of African American and Jewish Diaspora Politics

Black Nationalism was an integral part of the Black Power movement, although it was hardly the first instance of African American leaders making international connections between the state of African Americans in the United States and that of non-white populations elsewhere, as Masipula Sithole argued in "Black Americans and United States Policy Towards Africa" (329). It was particularly potent during the mid-1960s, however, because so many

non-white nations – particularly on the continent of Africa – had recently won their independence and escaped from colonial rule. This instilled a great deal of pride in the African American community. Where, before, colonized peoples in African nations and elsewhere had represented little hope for African American equality in the United States, after the wave of de-colonization, African Americans could look to the Third World and see non-white leaders governing themselves (326). Black Nationalism in the United States was intertwined with Third-Worldism, a philosophy that stressed international connections between non-whites or oppressed populations in general. Third-Worldist ideology presented a challenge both to the ongoing national obsession with Communist containment and American foreign policy in general. This globalized struggle adopted a worldview in which the key dividing line in society was between the haves and the have-nots – rather than between democratic and communistic governments (326). The rejection, yet again, of supposedly homegrown "American norms" confounded many Americans.

Following the Six-Day War in 1967, American Jews also began to noticeably turn inward[4] – not wholly unlike the phenomenon already under way in the African American community. The possibility of the annihilation of Israel in 1967 created a sense of solidarity among Jews in the United States, both among themselves and with Israeli Jews. The American Jewish community, according to Taylor Branch, "underwent an abrupt, radical, and possibly permanent change" following Israel's decisive victory over its Arab neighbors (748). The intense feelings of Jewish pride among American Jews following the Israeli victory engendered a revitalization of Jewish group identity. Support for Israel – whether it was abstract, economic, or political – "became the 'secular religion' of many Jews" ("Race Revolution" 218), a sentiment echoed by Daniel Pipes (141). This shift in ideology was multi-generational – young Jews took an unprecedented interest in the Jewish community and in their Jewish heritage (Zeitz 254).

The clash between American Jews and African Americans adopted an international dimension following the 1967 War. Some African American radical leaders denounced Israel as an expansionist, imperialist outpost of the United States and publicly announced their support for the Arab cause. Many American Jews were horrified at this

critique of Israel, which had been so recently established to protect the Jewish people against their own oppressors. In particular, the debate between the African American and the Jewish communities often came down to a disagreement regarding the nature of anti-Zionism. Was anti-Zionism synonymous with anti-Semitism, or not? Was criticizing Israeli policy automatically anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic? Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the SNCC during the Six-Day War, "claimed that intensive Zionist propaganda had effectively persuaded people to support Israel and that anyone who disagreed was liable to be denounced as anti-Semitic" (Young 78). Other radical African American leaders (the Black Panthers, for example) openly agreed with Carmichael's argument. Many other African American leaders didn't disagree with these claims, thus heightening the specter of African American anti-Semitism.

Jews often felt that African Americans did not understand or appreciate Jewish identification with Israel. African American radicals were at times dismissive – if not derisive – toward the historic oppression of Jews and the real need for an independent Jewish state. Perceiving the Jewish experience in the United States as a story of integration and social mobility, African Americans sometimes begrudged American Jews for what they saw as false claims of suffering (Young 79).

Some African Americans also felt that their opinions regarding the international sphere were disregarded out of hand or considered illegitimate by members of the white elite in general and by members of the Jewish elite specifically. [5] This was an extension of the oft-heard complaint that Jews were paternalistic and condescending in relation to African Americans. Some African Americans also took issue with the sheer expense of American involvement in Israel as a drain on resources, similar to Vietnam, that might be used to better effect on domestic concerns. Finally, some saw U.S.-Israeli relations as an example of the power of American Jews.[6] Others have rightly pointed out that though the interests of the American government may coincide with the interests of minority groups, – as is often the case regarding American Jews and Israel – minority interests do not have the power to set the American foreign policy agenda, as made clear by Shoshi Shain (72).

Who Has the Power? Ocean Hill-Brownsville Goes National

In 1968, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district incident in Brooklyn, New York rapidly escalated hostilities between African Americans and Jews throughout the country. Essentially, this pitted poor African American and Puerto Rican parents who wished to exert more control over their children's education against the largely Jewish United Federation of Teachers (UFT) union. This incident, more than any other preceding it, exemplified the irreconcilability of the material objectives sought by the Jewish and African American communities. The parents of students enrolled in Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools thought that a "community control" model would better serve their children's educational needs – needs that, according to Louis Kushnick, were sorely being neglected in the current environment. Attempts to integrate New York schools had been ground to a halt by the efforts of concerned white parents. As Kushnick writes, African American parents were left with increasingly fewer options: "Their demands are based on the view that segregated schools are the given – that the real choice facing black parents is whether their children will go to good segregated schools or bad segregated schools – at least for the near future" (207). In response to these demands for community control over this and other districts, John V. Lindsay, then-mayor of New York City, divided the school system by neighborhood, and localized boards were given the power to hire and fire administrators and teachers. In Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the parent board chose Rhody McCoy as superintendent. McCoy fired nineteen administrators and teachers, most of them Jewish, shortly after assuming his post, and the UFT union began a strike that would last for two months.

The situation took an even nastier turn when pamphlets turned up in the mailboxes of Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers that described Jewish teachers as unfit to teach African American children, not least because they were "Middle East murderers of Colored People" ("The Late Sixties" 261). Albert Shanker, the Jewish president of the UFT, made some 500,000 copies of these pamphlets and dispersed them throughout the country in an attempt to publicize the radical and anti-Semitic elements lobbying for community control. Shanker said "he wished to show what kind of people wanted to take over the schools," although a later inquiry by the New York Civil Liberties Union "showed

that the scurrilous material had come from outside the district" ("The Late Sixties" 261). Community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville did not last out the year. The anger exposed and fostered by both sides during this incident was the first widely publicized example of direct conflict between Jewish and African American interests.

The conflict was symptomatic of the general dynamic between urban African Americans and middle-class Jews in service-oriented positions, particularly in New York City but throughout the country as well.[7] Many scholars interpret Ocean-Hill Brownsville primarily as a struggle for political power between these two groups of people, although which actors are vilified in these accounts differs. Murray Friedman, for example, writes that superintendent McCoy was "an angry and determined black man with a deep distrust of whites," who thought that "a racist, capitalist America had made the education of black, poor white, and Third World children nearly impossible" (*What Went Wrong* 260). Friedman also stresses the role that Shanker took in the civil rights struggle, calling him "the leading integrationist in the labor movement" although other accounts do not mention this or do not give it contextual prominence (*What Went Wrong* 259). Finally, Friedman makes an apologist argument in light of Shanker's behavior, which is atypical in the literature – essentially, that although he may have exaggerated or lied about anti-Semitic activity surrounding Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Shanker was only expressing widely-felt Jewish anxiety concerning African American anti-Semitism (*What Went Wrong* 261). Others challenge this version of events. Ferretti, for example, argues that

> black anti-Semitism…was an issue fearful enough to make the liberal group which favored educational reform back away. It was, moreover, an issue which, once discovered by the UFT and its president, Albert Shanker, could be neutralized only by an alert and responsible press. (646)

In other words, Ferretti posits that the UFT leadership was largely responsible for the denigration of the debate from one over community-controlled education to one over black bigotry. Shanker engineered the appearance of the menace of African American anti-Semitism because it was in the interest of the union to turn public

opinion against the parents of Ocean Hill-Brownsville students. The infusion of anti-Semitism into the debate – whether real, perceived, or engineered – caused the strike and surrounding conflict to become an ongoing national news story.

Ferretti goes on to point out the willingness of the press to accept Shanker's accusations as gospel and the Jewish establishment's reorientation on the subject of African American anti-Semitism during the Ocean Hill debate. This reorientation, he argues, was a direct result of Shanker's fear mongering. The motives for this change in establishment ideology were not uniform, however. The conservative institutions – the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), for one – may have used the controversy opportunistically, although other Jewish groups – the liberal American Jewish Congress – were loathe to support Shanker and the union until *not* supporting him became a political liability, as explained by Walter Karp and H.R. Shapiro (660-68).

Conclusion

The arguments regarding the cause of the conflict typically fall into one of two broad categories. First, there are arguments concerning the material changes in domestic and international dynamics that directly affected each group and affected the relations between the groups. Second, there are arguments that the conflict emerged from incendiary rhetoric and/or mutual misunderstanding. Of course, the most sophisticated analyses interpret the conflict through multiple lenses and take into account both material change and rhetoric employed at the time.

The radicalization of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s is frequently discussed as a key factor in the deteriorating relationship between African Americans and Jews. Simply put, the old liberal reform agenda did not substantively change the lives of many African Americans, and "integration" for non-whites seemed to be a cruel myth. Carson argues that many Jews did not share these "doubts about the assimilationist values that pervaded liberal racial reform efforts" ("Black-Jewish Universalism" 184). Throughout the 1960s, it increasingly became obvious that what enabled Jewish Americans to obtain equal status in American society would not necessarily be sufficient to achieve African American equality. But, frequently, Jews found it difficult to grasp the challenges facing the African American

community because they had shared common legal obstacles to equality in such recent memory, as Eric Goldstein writes:

> Ironically, because these Jews wanted to see themselves as having risen from a disadvantaged "outsider" background and were uncomfortable with the notion that they had been aided by white privilege, they were insensitive to ways in which African Americans had been denied many of the integrationist opportunities Jews had been afforded. (215)

Likewise, African Americans expected Jews to remain firm on African American rights because they had in the recent past. Both groups began to noticeably turn inwards in the mid-1960s, and the importance of group identity began to increase as well. This political and social climate engendered, as Carson puts it, "leaders who sought to demonstrate their loyalty to group interests by attacking those involved in intergroup political alliances" ("Politics of Relations" 138). Moderate leaders were denounced as traitorous (or, at the very least, out-dated and inefficient if they did not alter their stances. As the movement changed, "some Jewish civil rights leaders found it increasingly difficult to support black militancy as it moved beyond the ideological boundaries of earlier civil rights efforts" ("Politics of Relations" 140). The desire to maintain group cohesion also often prevented moderates from attacking extremists in their own communities.

Inside both the Jewish and African American communities, the level of dissent was strong. But outside perceptions of these communities – including Jewish perceptions of African Americans and African American perceptions of Jews – tended to either ignore or be uninformed of these internal differences. One effect of these misperceptions was to hold the entire community accountable for the bigotry of a few outspoken individuals. This was especially true in instances where African Americans made anti-Semitic statements. Carson describes the conundrum below:

> For many Jewish commentators, these events were used as evidence that some black leaders harbored anti-Semitic feelings and that others were unreliable friends who were reluctant to stand up to the black anti-Semites. For many African-Americans,

the events suggested that Jewish leaders were overbearing in their insistence that black leaders publicly repudiate isolated expressions of anti-Semitism over which the leaders had no control. ("Politics of Relations" 133)

Coalitions are made and broken every day between political actors and groups. Why did the collapse of the Civil Rights coalition between African Americans and Jewish elites cause such anguish, then? I think a large part of the answer – and this is echoed by some – is that Jews and African Americans expected better of one another. The civil rights alliance between African Americans and American Jews was imbued with a certain moral authority – whether this was primarily an outside projection or not is perhaps now beside the point – that stemmed from both groups' histories of oppression and the general "rightness" of their cause. A sense of shared moral authority based on separate histories of trauma, though, is not enough to form a political coalition – and, case in point, neither is it enough to sustain a pre-existing coalition. Though the true basis for cooperation were the overlapping political goals of the Jewish and African American elites in the Civil Rights movement, the element of shared morality had popular appeal in both communities and soon became part of mass Jewish and African American consciousness. When the coalition came to an end, it seemed to be not only an ending of political partnership but a betrayal: both sides attacked the other for their loss of moral authority[8] (Greenberg 168).

My final observation regarding this debate could potentially be applied to other instances of identity and/or group politics. That is, the apparent inability of extreme elements on both sides of the debate to engage in any sort of constructive self-reflection is ironic, given the fact that the arguments between African Americans and Jews in this time period were almost always couched in concern with self-identity and group consciousness. The most vitriolic epithets and expressions of hate leveled at one side or the other so often belie a preoccupation not with the abominable "Other" but with the self. Of course, some actors had a vested political interest in driving a wedge in the alliance and so went about pointedly "misunderstanding." Further community isolation, whether imposed or self-selected, created a possible political opening for articulate and charismatic speakers and writers in both

communities.

Others, however – and I think, the majority – sincerely misunderstood the concerns and anxieties of the other side. The larger context of "define yourself or be defined" politics in this era of social upheaval and unrest placed tantamount importance on knowing – and being able to assert – who you are, where you come from, what you believe, and who you trust. But the process of identity formation in an atmosphere of hostility and distrust – and clearly demarcated social boundaries – devolved into a conversation about "what you are, and what I am not," or "what I am, and what you are not." The similarities between African Americans and Jews – the histories and traumas of each, and their shared stake and belief in the justness of the Civil Rights movement – could not keep the coalition from fracturing. The desire for group *difference* increasingly came to replace the desire to be just like everyone else.

Notes

1. Peter I. Rose (60-61). The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund was of special significance in civil rights court cases, including Brown v. Board. Jack Greenberg, an American Jew, helped argue the Brown case as a young attorney and later served as the Fund's director-counsel from 1961 to 1984. Also, the NAACP was co-founded in part by several prominent Jewish Americans.

2. Two Supreme Court cases in particular – De Funis v. Washington University, in 1974, and Bakke v. UC Davis, in 1978 – caused prominent African American and Jewish organizations and politicians to publicly align themselves on opposite sides of the debate.

3. Manning Marable gives an interesting and exhaustively detailed plan for a separate African American state within the geographic boundaries of the domestic U.S. in "The Third Reconstruction" (12-26).

4. Zeitz argues that the American Jewish establishment, at least, did *not* undergo such an ideological transformation (283).

5. Daniel Pipes argues that "out of gratitude for Jewish help in the civil rights movement, black groups once solidly supported Israel. In more recent years, however, divergences over affirmative action,

the lure of petrodollars, and identification with Third World causes led to a reorientation, and black leaders became among the most vocal supporters of the Arab cause" (79). Pipes' argument belies a condescending attitude toward African American foreign policy stances, and this attitude is fairly common in the literature.

6. Masipula Sithole casually remarks that "American Jews have almost always determined US policy in the Middle East" (330-31).

7. Andrew Hacker writes, "During the generation extending from the 1930s through the 1960s, Jews began to play a prominent role in the civil service, where they often administered rules affecting black citizens. In many cities, they were also becoming public school teachers and administrators, which gave them crucial authority over children and parents" (14-17).

8. Baldwin presciently writes, "If one blames the Jew for not having been ennobled by oppression, one is not indicting the single figure of the Jew but the entire human race, and one is also make a quiet breathtaking claim for oneself. I know that my own oppression did not ennoble me… I also know that if today I refuse to hate Jews, or anybody else, it is because I know how it feels to be hated" (12).

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