

## *An Anatomy of Black Anti-Semitism*

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IN AN UNUSUAL GESTURE, THE RADICAL JOURNALIST I. F. Stone invoked solidarity with American Jews when he advised this segment of his readership in 1968 "to swallow a few insults from overwrought blacks" who were espousing anti-Semitism. He recommended that such demagogues be treated with indulgence, as a passing phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Since then all the evidence leads to one conclusion: however vigorously a policy of salutary neglect was pursued, black anti-Semitism is not ephemeral. This particular version of the oldest of group libels, this latest installment in the tradition of malicious and irrational falsehoods against the Jewish people, has not been driven underground. It has persisted; in part of the African-American community it has even flourished. Its purveyors are not treated as cranks whose rantings do not extend beyond a corner of Hyde Park; instead they are invited to speak on university campuses and to present their views on national television programs. They are not invisible men. They do not dominate the African-American community, but they are not exactly unpopular either.

Though American Jewish groups are understandably concerned with why such prejudice has persisted (and how it might be resisted), they themselves have not been left alone in confronting the issue. Though varying in forthrightness, leading African-American intellectuals and academics have acknowledged and condemned this species of bigotry within their own community—most notably, the ubiquitous Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the equally voluble Cornel West, as well as Roger Wilkins, Bob Herbert, and others. These recent criticisms reinforce the sense of *déjà vu* all over again, since the topic of black anti-Semitism is about a generation old. The signposts have included anthologies edited by Shlomo Katz and by Nat Hentoff, whose contributors were mostly Jews; and Amira Baraka's repudiation of his own anti-Semitism.<sup>2</sup> The works of scholars and journalists like Hasia Diner, Robert Weisbord and Arthur Stein, and Jonathan Kaufman—themselves all Jewish—have also analyzed the phenomenon within a broader framework of relations between the two minorities.

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If the focus of this paper is exclusively on black anti-Semitism, the excuse is not only ontological (the limitations of space and time). Nor is it not out of denial that racism exists in the Jewish community. But a concentration on black anti-Semitism would be misplaced if something symmetrical could be observed in organized Jewish life. I am confident that this is not the case, that there is none of the ideological hostility to blacks that is equivalent to what emanates from part of African-Americans against Jews. This essay is therefore preoccupied with anti-Semitism because some African-Americans are preoccupied with spreading it. I also believe that black anti-Semitism can be treated in isolation because it is an isolated phenomenon. Its virulence is unmatched; its intensity has no analog in American society. Black anti-Semitism is so singular that it demands distinctive and emphatic focus.

Four illustrations are familiar enough to require little elaboration:

- 1) In 1988 Steve Cokely, coordinator for special projects for the mayor of Chicago, publicly charged that Jewish doctors were deliberately infecting black infants with the AIDS virus. Herbert Martin, the African-American minister who then chaired the city's Commission on Human Relations, acknowledged that this grotesque slander had "a ring of truth"; and Mayor Eugene Sawyer's own reaction was sluggish. It took him nearly a week to fire Cokely, whose lay diagnosis of the epidemic apparently did not disqualify him from being invited to speak at the University of Michigan.<sup>3</sup>
- 2) In Albany in the summer of 1991, Leonard Jeffries, an expert on the Afrocentric curriculum who was serving as chairperson of the Africana Studies Department at the City College of New York, noted the collusion of Hollywood Jews and their "financial partners, the Mafia," in controlling "a financial system of destruction of black people." He spoke of "a conspiracy, planned and plotted and programmed out of Hollywood," orchestrated by "people called Greenberg and Weisberg and Trigliani." The director of the African-American Institute at SUNY-Albany did not repudiate Jeffries' remarks but instead blamed the newspaper that reported them for "race-baiting."<sup>4</sup>
- 3) Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam extolled the greatness of Hitler, trashed Judaism as a "gutter religion," and was so consistently biased in his opinions of Jews that the Anti-Defamation League could devote three pamphlets quoting from similar remarks reported in the press. Having invited Arthur Butz of Northwestern University to address a Nation of Islam rally, Farrakhan has also been tangentially associated with those "revisionists" who deny that the Holocaust ever occurred. That posi-

tion contradicted the views of his own "National Assistant," Khalid Muhammad, who not only acknowledged its occurrence but, in a speech at Kean College in the fall of 1993, blamed the Jews themselves for inspiring genocide.<sup>5</sup>

- 4) In that same speech, Muhammad did not confine himself to the perfidy of Jews. He also broke with the official policy of the African National Congress in urging all whites to leave South Africa. Otherwise "we kill the women, we kill the children, we kill the babies. We kill the blind, we kill the crippled, [inaudible] we kill 'em all. We kill the faggot, we kill the lesbian, we kill them all," adding: "Goddammit, and when you get through killing 'em all, go to the goddam graveyard and dig up the grave and kill 'em, goddam, again. 'Cause they didn't die hard enough." Control of the White House, the media, the economy and "many of our [black] politicians" was ascribed to the epitome of evil, depicted in a February 19 speech in Baltimore as "that old no-good Jew, that old imposter Jew, that old hooknose, bagel-eating, lox-eating . . . so-called damn Jew."<sup>6</sup>

The freakish character of such malevolence deserves underscoring. Critics of such anti-Semitism have trouble finding any equivalent to such vitriol within the Jewish community, any provocation to such rancor. The best that a contributor to *The New Yorker* could discover was "the case of the Jewish comedian Jackie Mason, who managed to make slurs sound funny." (The mayoral candidate for whom Mason was campaigning in New York City was not amused, and forthrightly disavowed him for using a demeaning Yiddish term to depict incumbent David Dinkins.)<sup>7</sup> Yet such hostility is concentrated upon American Jews, who are unique in being so unashamedly targeted for such spite in a polyglot society that has striven to stigmatize the public expression of bigotry.

To any historian committed to the ideal of democratic pluralism, such a focus upon Jewish infamy is remarkable. I do not subscribe to the notion of collective guilt, to the habit of blaming groups for the crimes of ancestors. The accusation of deicide, for example, has inflicted terrible consequences upon the Jews of the Diaspora; an echo of such reasoning can be detected in 1917 in Secretary of State Robert Lansing's opposition to Zionism, for he shared the widespread Christian "resent[ment of] turning the Holy Land over to the absolute control of the race credited with the death of Christ." With Vatican II, the statute of limitations expired on that charge in 1965. But while it would be natural for African-Americans to look back in anger on all the trouble they've seen, all the unrequited toil and terrible injustice that permeate their past, it is puzzling and perverse to convert contemporary Jews into scapegoats. From 1619 on, African-Americans have suffered most grievously at the hands of Southern whites;

and yet it is noteworthy how little ire or even attention is drawn toward them. The rhetoric of African-American nationalism incorporates few slurs, few if any reminders of the shoot-on-sight violence that disfigured the Southern past, few pay-back adumbrations of primordial animosity visited upon the descendants of those who voted for the likes of Vardaman, Bilbo, Blease, and Rankin, or even those who themselves elected Faubus, Eastland, Talmadge, or Helms. George Wallace ("I say, Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!") happened to have won less than 1 percent of the Jewish vote in his 1968 Presidential campaign. But he won a 1986 poll among African-Americans in Alabama as the finest governor in the state's history.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the region's whites have redeemed themselves, and have made impressive strides in "overcoming the past." But is such *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* enough to account for why, after centuries of slavery, Jim Crow, lynchings and other horrors, American Jews should be stuck with the bill?

The African-Americans who moved North often came into conflict with various immigrant groups; and when such encounters produced ugly violence, they were usually the victims. Recall a couple of scenes from James T. Farrell's Chicago *Bildungsroman*, starting with Red Kelly's warning to his friends: "You know, boys, the goddamn shines are getting too frisky coming around here." He adds that "a decent girl can't walk alone here any more for fear a nigger might rape her. They ruin the park. When they come over here, you need a gas-mask if you want to stick around. . . . The Polacks and Dagoes and niggers are the same, only the niggers are the lowest. That's why I say we ought to get the boys together some night and clean every nigger out of the park. . . . If we do it once, they won't come back. We can get a few billies and clubs, and if they try to use razors, make them just wish they hadn't." Then, in an episode based on the 1919 race riots, Farrell discloses how remote was the distance from alabaster cities that gleam, undimmed by human tears, as one "gang of bloodthirsty kids" taunt another to "Let's go!" Clubs and sticks were brandished. Three Star Hennessey gritted his teeth, and slashed the air with a straight razor. Weary Reilley casually and publicly examined a .22 revolver. Kenny Kilarney put on a pair of brass knuckles. . . . Studs Lonigan gripped a baseball bat, and . . . said that when he cracked a dinge in the head, the goddamn eight ball would think it had been Ty Cobb slamming out a homer off Walter Johnson. . . . Tommy Doyle said the niggers were never going to forget the month of July, 1919. Studs said that they ought to hang every nigger in the city to the telephone poles, and let them swing there in the breeze. Benny Taite said that for every white man killed in the riots, ten black apes ought to be massacred. . . ." When the gang gets to Wabash Avenue and State Street, "the streets were like avenues of the dead."<sup>9</sup> This terrifying scene has no equivalent in American Jewish fiction,

because no such episode has occurred in American Jewish history. Yet there is little evidence of African-American rage directed at, say, Irish-Americans.

Finally, consider the utter absorption with the group that African-American anti-Semites have identified as the culprit behind what Melville termed "man's foulest crime."<sup>10</sup> In February on *The Arsenio Hall Show*, Farrakhan was permitted to plug a volume entitled *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews* (1991), a farrago of lies, misrepresentations, and factoids that obsessively and misleadingly blames Jewry for the system of antebellum bondage. Of course some Jews owned slaves. So did far, far more numerous church-going Southern whites; so did some free Southern blacks; so did some Native Americans; and of course, Africans had enslaved one another. But the work of phony scholarship that Farrakhan was permitted to pitch, without contradiction, does not dwell on such widespread ownership of other human beings. A book about the "secret relationship" between blacks and Native American tribes would not get the juices flowing; only Jewish-American turpitude, it would appear, can activate such passions, and so *The Secret Relationship* highlights the tiny fraction of the Old South's slaveholding Jews—which Farrakhan inflated up to 75 percent. Asked about that preposterous figure, the NAACP's director of communications, whose distant predecessor had been the scholarly W. E. B. DuBois, admitted that the Minister "may have exaggerated the historical fact"; but such a percentage was "a matter for academics to debate." Historians did not bother to refute such propaganda, though the Anti-Defamation League defended the honor (at the very least) of the "two-thirds of the .5 percent of America's population that was Jewish [which] arrived in this country during the final dozen or so years of the slave era." Questions were obvious: "How can the authors [of *The Secret Relationship*] continually refer to 'the Jews' as a monolith, when the vast majority of Jewish Americans in 1860 neither owned slaves nor lived in slave states? How could the 50,000 'indigenous' Jews who lived in America prior to 1850, or the few hundred families among them known to have owned slaves, have been responsible for the importation of millions of slaves? And what, aside from their ethnicity, is so different about these Jewish slave owners from the rest of the slave-owning population that their activities merit a separate 'historical' analysis?"<sup>11</sup>

The Nation of Islam also ignores Islam. Though centuries ahead of Europeans in the African slave trade and the last to abandon it, Arabs have usually been exempted from the accusations of collective guilt in which African-American nationalists have indulged. The omission is striking. At Versailles in 1919, at the very moment when the peacemakers were wrestling with, among other challenges, the first Pan-African Congress, the British promise of a Jewish homeland, and the minority rights treaties

(championed by an early civil rights attorney, Louis Marshall of the American Jewish Committee), Prince Feisal represented Arab interests. The photograph of him surrounded by his retinue includes his African slave. Having emerged from the house of bondage, some African-Americans have found their way to the House of Saud, which even snookered so street-wise and wary a character as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz into ignoring the tardiness with which slavery was abolished in Saudi Arabia (by royal decree in 1962).<sup>12</sup> Never tiring of chastising white America for the system of slavery abolished a century earlier, Malcolm X could not bring himself to criticize a kingdom that had abolished slavery only two years earlier. Though the exiled Eldridge Cleaver claimed to have seen black slaves in Algeria, and condemned Arabs as among "the most racist people on earth,"<sup>13</sup> African-American nationalists have not made it clear why, according to the fashions of moral accounting, the historic responsibility of Arabs for African slavery is wiped off the books. Perhaps it is a "black thing," and others wouldn't understand. But the inference is irresistible that the current brand of black anti-Semitism is not free-floating; it is focused. It attacks Jews not because they are whites but because they are Jews, while ignoring "Bubba" and virtually everyone else—even those whose own ancestors' persecution of African-Americans was barbaric. Such Jew-hatred is therefore not a surrogate for a diffused hatred of whites, as James Baldwin had argued.<sup>14</sup> "Mr. Goldberg" is not an interchangeable symbol for "Mr. Charlie." Its purveyors are not anti-Semites because they are bigots; rather, they are bigots because they are anti-Semites.

A second feature of this enduring phenomenon is its coarseness. Vulgar and primitive in its attribution of a diabolical cunning that seems limitless, it is not content with slurs, or with derogatory remarks. It raises the stakes of falsehood in a way that depends upon sheer credulity, indistinguishable from superstition, and reflecting a premodern, antiscientific mentality in which accepted standards of proof or disproof no longer operate. Such anti-Semitism taps the most absurd myths and irrational beliefs, the preposterous fears associated with the Middle Ages, when the poisoning of wells, the spreading of plagues, the murdering of Christian children (so that their blood could be baked with matza) get updated, for example, in Cokely's charges of a Jewish doctors' plot. Such anti-Semitism cannot be countered either with common sense or with empirical evidence, though the decline of such standards is part of a larger problem: public education has become so ineffectual that only about half the American populace realizes that the earth revolves around the sun; over forty percent of the citizenry still inhabits a pre-Copernican universe.

Hollywood cinema can, for example, be analyzed in terms of its likely effects upon popular consciousness, and the biases and negative stereotypes

that historically and currently are conveyed through movies and other forms of mass communication can be located. The bibliography is rich, thanks to scholars in fields like African-American studies, ethnic studies, American studies, and communications. But scholarship is not what Jeffries presented. His speech at the Empire State Black Arts Festival was no contribution to the topic but instead a conspiracy theory that ascribes wickedness to Jews (not as individuals, not a category confined to movie producers, not a category enlarged to include moviemakers who are not Jewish). The disproportionate role of Jews in Hollywood does not prove that they acted in a cohesive fashion, or that they acted primarily as Jews rather than as businessmen—or even that they allowed their ethnic origins to influence their movies in a particularistic way. When Steven Spielberg tried “to find movies to help inspire me to make *Schindler’s List*,” he told an interviewer, “I couldn’t find any.” The moguls repudiated any distinctive Jewish culture and “chose being American with fierce determination. And all I can say is that it’s reflected in their choice of movies they didn’t make.”<sup>15</sup> But such nuances matter little to the lurid and feverish concoctions of contemporary black anti-Semitism.

In the published excerpts of Muhammad’s speech at Kean College, American Jews are not accused of any particular acts harmful to African-Americans, or even held accountable for any notably racist attitudes. He mentions no organization that purports to represent the Jewish community, and curiously enough only one individual: Harry Oppenheimer (a convert to Anglicanism whose father, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, had converted to Catholicism). If Jewry is to be judged by the individuals it produces, why not mention William Moses Kunstler, counsel for numerous civil rights groups and the criminal defense attorney who represented the defendants in the World Trade Center bombing, as well as El Sayyid A. Nosair, charged with assassinating Meir Kahane in 1990? Kunstler’s early association with the Committee on Social Action of the American Jewish Congress tied him far closer to the Jewish world than Oppenheimer—but factual rebuttal can gain little traction against an ideological vision.

That *Weltanschauung* is an instance of “the paranoid style,” in which the operations of history do not merely include episodic conspiracies. Instead “history is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces,” in Richard Hofstadter’s formulation<sup>16</sup>; and this sensibility is commonplace enough to inspire a satiric bumper sticker: “Humpty Dumpty Was Pushed.” The demonic forces can be quite specific, however. As early as the fourteenth century, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both Wyclif and Chaucer were using the term “conspire” to refer to the Jews. Whatever sins and crimes they are supposed to have committed typify the group—though their accusers expend little effort to show the communal purpo-

siveness of, say, even American Jews, or whether its source is ethnic or religious rather than some other motive. The conspiratorial imagination does not accept the historical record as a repository of contingencies and accidents; and within it Jews do not act except as members of a shadowy, string-pulling collectivity. What John Hay said of his "clean daft" and "wild" friend Henry Adams, for whom "the Jews are all the press, all the cabinets, all the gods and weather,"<sup>17</sup> could easily be fast-forwarded alongside Jeffries and Muhammad's speeches, the most recent manifestations of the negative stereotyping that has been embedded in Christendom for centuries.

They can be read as continuous with the entire tradition of Western anti-Semitism, with its long association—sustained over the past century by monetary cranks—of the Jews with lucre: "You call yourself Mr. Reubenstein, Mr. Goldstein, Mr. Silverstein. Because you been stealing rubies and gold and silver all over the earth. That's why we can't even wear a ring or a bracelet or a necklace without calling it Jew-elry. . . . We found out that the Federal Reserve ain't really owned by the Federal Government. . . . It's owned by the Jews," who also fiendishly exercise control of the media, including "the textbooks . . . the libraries. Liebraries. NBC, ABC, CBS, you don't see nothin', or makes sure we don't see. Warner Brothers, Paramount, huh? Hollywood, period. . . . [They] are also the most influential in newspaper, magazine, print media and electronic media. . . . They have our entertainers in their hip pocket." Such power, exercised through disproportionate wealth and corruption of the sources of discourse, is supposed to have modern society itself in its grip, as though a sinister cabal were in charge. "I don't care who sits in the seat at the White House," Muhammad added. "You can believe that the Jews control that seat that they sit in from behind the scenes. They control the finance, and not only that, they influence the policy-making." A fantasy of all-encompassing Jewish evil thus sustains an invocation to Fight the Power—and ignores the disorganized condition of organized American Jewry. (Those aspiring to lead so diffuse and fragmented a group are advised not to be "control freaks." In 1921, while Lithuanian-Americans had thirteen national organizations, Finnish-Americans eleven, German-Americans eight and Italian-Americans two, the Jews had already formed eighty-six.)<sup>18</sup>

One source of paranoid inspiration may be *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a notorious forgery that the Czarist police concocted a century ago, an utter fabrication that influenced Adolf Hitler. When an African-American student magazine at UCLA, *Nommo*, printed an article that claimed some validity to the *Protocols*, African-American faculty members refused to comment; one of them privately explained that students already considered them "insufficiently militant" and did not wish to widen the gap. Though the

*Protocols* can easily be found in Arab bookstores (which have sold an estimated sixty Arabic editions) and influenced President Nasser of Egypt, this work has been discredited in the United States since the 1920s—except in the most feral anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi circles and apparently among some African-American nationalists.<sup>19</sup> Try to imagine an equivalent. Protestant clubs on campuses do not have tables for anti-Catholic forgeries like Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal* (1836) and its *Further Disclosures* (1837). (Three-hundred thousand copies of these tracts had been sold by the outset of the Civil War, helping to instigate nativist and "Know Nothing" passions during the most violent anti-Catholic period in American history.)<sup>20</sup> When the Newman Club or the Wesley Foundation meets on campus, pamphlets that blame the perfidious Jews for decide are not disseminated. When clubs that may be predominantly white hold meetings on campuses, they do not provide videocassettes of *The Birth of a Nation* (which is, in any event, an original work of cinematic art—and therefore, despite its racism, not comparable to the *Protocols*). Nor do white fraternities at Ole Miss distribute Bilbo's 1947 opus, *Take Your Choice—Segregation or Mongrelization*, which at least faithfully represents the Senator's views—unlike the *Protocols*, a fiction masquerading as fact, reporting the aims of a cabal that never existed.

The attraction of that Czarist forgery reinforces the glum generalization that black anti-Semitism is notable as well for its status on the campus, presumably the launching pad of future communal leaders. Some of the Talented Tenth love it when Nation of Islam spokesmen talk dirty, and make Black History Month a forum for outbursts of abuse (legitimated in the guise of pleas for "diversity" and student autonomy). Nat Hentoff has reported "a strong strain of anti-Semitism among some—not all, by any means—black students," many of whom had not been born when Stone was advising patience with "overwrought" demagogues. Not exactly rabble-rousers, they appeal not only (or not primarily) to ill-educated masses but to those "young, gifted, and black," who invite such speakers with metronomic regularity,<sup>21</sup> and without disclaimers that their anti-Semitism is deplorable. Such speakers are sometimes cheered not *despite* their anti-Semitism but *because* of it. Asked whether undergraduates inviting Farrakhan were making an anti-Semitic gesture, Alvin Poussaint of Harvard Medical School replied: "Not necessarily."<sup>22</sup> After Muhammad spoke during Black History Month at Kent State, an associate professor of education denied that the 1,650 persons in attendance had heard any negative stereotypes. "There's an assumption that when he said 'Jews are bloodsuckers' he meant all Jews," Anita Jackson opined. "He clarified during his speech here that he meant only those people who set up their shops, charge higher prices, and then leave the

neighborhoods with the money. That's what the students agree with." A Howard University group called Unity Nation not only brought Muhammad, Jeffries, and other proponents of a Jewish conspiracy to the campus, but also caused officials to cancel (or at least postpone) a lecture on the Haitian slave insurrection by David Brion Davis, Sterling Professor of History at Yale, a convert to Judaism and an authority not only on slavery but on conspiracy. The atmosphere was deemed too "volatile."<sup>23</sup>

The singularity of this phenomenon again needs to be noticed. Though the contemporary campus is so sensitive to articulated prejudice that undergraduates can be threatened with administrative punishment for calling loud African-American students "water buffaloes" (not a racial epithet) and for laughing at a joke about homosexuals,<sup>24</sup> invective directed against American Jews—if perpetrated by African-Americans—seems immunized against the charge of prejudice. At Kean State a campus project has been training faculty members and administrators to reduce prejudice among their students. Its codirector was asked whether Muhammad's speech at Kean State typified the prejudice that the project was combating. Refusing comment, Lois C. Richardson typified instead the point of deconstruction: "Our students are astute enough to make decisions about opinions they hear. We can't tell our students what to think."<sup>25</sup> It should be added that few, if any, incidents of anti-Semitism among other "students of color" (Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans) have been reported, just as Jeffries' anti-Semitism has no counterpart in the United States among, say, chairpersons of Ukrainian Studies or Polish Studies programs. The acceptability of anti-Semitism among African-Americans pursuing the higher learning in America may still be too novel for Jewish defense agencies to figure out how to address, since racial and religious prejudice usually correlates with formal education *and* with age. At least since the 1930s, the more years of schooling Gentiles had, the less likely to be bamboozled; the younger they were, the less likely to harbor negative attitudes about the Jewish people. African-American divergence from this pattern was discerned about when anti-Semitism was vanishing elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

The mid-1960s marks the caesura. In 1965 even the *American Jewish Yearbook* dropped its listing on anti-Semitism,<sup>27</sup> because whatever little there was to report had become so marginalized. That generalization also applied to the minority then known as Negroes, because until then the evidence of black anti-Semitism was limited, rare, and impressionistic. Perhaps the two most quoted sources were the passing remarks of literary figures. Richard Wright's 1945 autobiography mentions a casual animosity back in Arkansas ("all of us black people who lived in the

neighborhood hated Jews"), that seemed a counterpart to peasant attitudes that Jews had already encountered in *Mitteleuropa*. In that era Southern Jews tended to belong to the mercantile class that "don't plant taters and don't plant cotton"; and, to many customers, how these retailers and middlemen prospered was mysterious, and even parasitic (though the main objection, Wright claimed, was deicide). Within three years of *Black Boy*, James Baldwin would note that "just as society must have a scapegoat, so hatred must have a symbol. Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew."<sup>28</sup> Of course neither Wright nor Baldwin record such attitudes in any way that suggests approval; they merely report, without trying either to justify or to exculpate anti-Semitism. Oddly enough, Wright's memory may not even be accurate (since it is so difficult to find corroborating evidence among rural Southern African-Americans). But such attitudes were in any event expressions of private prejudice rather than public discourse, and do not suggest either a general ideological framework, or something transmitted by an elite of "opinion leaders."

For nearly another two decades thereafter, it would be hard to pick up the work of an African-American author and find anything but good will toward Jews (if they are mentioned at all), whether in Ralph Ellison's belief that "the United States [is] freer politically and richer culturally because there are Jewish Americans to bring it the benefit of their special forms of dissent, their humor and their gift for ideas," or in Marian Anderson's autobiographical description of her visit to Israel, or LeRoi Jones's 1961 faith that "if perhaps there were more Judeo-Americans and a few less bland, culture-less, middle-headed AMERICANS, this country might still be a great one," or even more dramatically in Sammy Davis, Jr.'s account of his own acceptance of Judaism.<sup>29</sup> Affirmation and empathy were especially pronounced on the left, whether anti-Communist (Bayard Rustin), pro-Communist (DuBois) or very pro-Communist (Paul Robeson). In 1949, for example, while Stalin's regime was brutally engaged in extirpating Yiddish culture, Robeson was touring the Soviet Union, and chose to conclude his Moscow concert program with only one encore: a Yiddish song of the Warsaw ghetto resistance. The audience was stunned, tearful, and grateful to its beloved "Pavel Vasilyevich."<sup>30</sup>

The decomposition of positive attitudes toward Jews came in 1967 with the Six-Day War, which provoked SNCC's *Newsletter* to condemn Israel for "massacres" inflicted upon the Arab population. Anti-Zionism, barely known until then in the African-American community, dovetailed with the criticism that SNCC's program director leveled against Jewish rapacity. But SNCC's office was hardly unique, since Israel's stunning military victory and occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had the effect of undermining its international support elsewhere. Charles de

Gaulle, long a friend of Zionism, did not contradict an opinion that he wafted into a press conference in Paris, labeling the Jews "an elite people, sure of itself and dominating" (a nasty crack despite a quick effort at spin control, in which such attributes were interpreted as qualities which the haughty President *admired*). In New York the ex-president of the Union Theological Seminary was even harsher. "All persons who seek to view the Middle East problem with honesty and objectivity stand aghast at Israel's onslaught," Henry P. Van Dusen asserted. This military attack the liberal Protestant theologian condemned as "the most violent, ruthless (and successful) aggression since Hitler's blitzkrieg . . . aiming not at victory but at annihilation."<sup>31</sup> In so feverish a context, SNCC's explicit denunciation of Israel may not have looked especially strange, or even gratuitous; and only in retrospect could it be fathomed that the most militant versions of African-American nationalism and support of the Third World blurred the line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.<sup>32</sup> Identification with the Jewish fate did not entirely evaporate among African-American leftists, but such concern became increasingly rare.

Here the innovator was Malcolm X, who has surely been the most imposing and ambiguous influence in the formation of African-American ideology in the last three decades. He is the first political figure in African-American history who resists classification as a champion of civil rights, which he scorned. Murdered while the civil rights movement was on the cusp of success, he attracted little tangible allegiance among the masses. But the eclipse of the ideal of judging citizens "by the content of their character" instead of "the color of their skin" accelerated the rise of his posthumous impact. His combination of black nationalism and a pro-Third World ideological perspective (initially of course linked with the Nation of Islam) coincided with a bundle of prejudices; like other self-educated people, he tended to generalize too broadly from his own personal experience in the acrimony that he expressed toward women, Christians, the African-American middle class, and whites in general (though he was evolving). Though anti-Semitism was an attitude he disclaimed rather than exulted in, his autobiography is peppered with anti-Jewish remarks; and his legacy has proven volatile in authorizing much of the anti-Semitism in the African-American community. Until Malcolm X, not even any significant African-American nationalist had propagated anti-Semitism (or entwined it with anti-Zionism); in this sort of ideological mobilization, he was the pioneer.

While attitudinal surveys have shown falling mean levels of anti-Semitism among white Gentiles, the mean levels of anti-Semitism among African-Americans has risen since the assassination of Malcolm X; by 1981 the rate was 20 percent higher than among whites.<sup>33</sup> In October 1969 the Prime Minister of Israel paid a state visit that included a stop at the

Milwaukee elementary school that Golda Meir had attended as a child. The pupils serenaded her by singing the Israeli national anthem, "Hatikvah," in Hebrew, even though by then all the pupils in her former school were African-Americans.<sup>34</sup> A quarter of a century later, with Afrocentrism now part of that city's school curriculum, such a visit would have become virtually unimaginable.

Occasionally thrust into the glare of the larger society, black anti-Semites have veered from defiance to casuistry. The headlights of onrushing political traffic sometimes force even Farrakhan to pretend to deny what he is. But one such self-exculpation was bizarre, as when he assured the audience tuned into *The Arsenio Hall Show* that he "never desired to put another human being in an oven."<sup>35</sup> Anything less lethal than genocide is presumably not to be defined as anti-Semitism, which is made synonymous with the Final Solution. Of course, by that logic, neither Senator John C. Calhoun nor even General Nathan Bedford Forrest would pass muster as racists, since neither favored genocide. If racism were equated only with the Nazi policy of extermination, then it might be inferred that those favoring the enslavement or the segregation or the degradation of African-Americans would have been exonerated too. But that is not apparently the reasoning of the Nation of Islam. If it is very easy to be innocent of "anti-Semitism" (not wishing to inflict mass murder is sufficient), it is very hard—for Jews at least—to be exonerated of "racism." When Phil Donahue argued with Khalid Muhammad that the martyrdom of Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman in 1964 proved that not all Jews are racists, Muhammad coolly replied: "O. K.—that's two."<sup>36</sup> In the setting in which the guest whom Donahue booked habitually operates, hostility to Jews is unapologetic and spiteful. Unlike the public stance of Islam, which professes only to be anti-Zionist, black anti-Semitism feels little obligation to deny its animus, which—far from being shameful—adds to its interest and appeal. Its proponents are protected under the First Amendment, though in violation of the Clean Air Act (befouling an atmosphere in which the Jewish people are downwind). They enjoy the sort of publicity that must arouse the envy of, say, the leadership of the Urban League, and have been getting the exposure that an already violent society sees no reason to withdraw.

Though a pogrom occurred in 1991 in Crown Heights, New York, where the lynch mob was African-American and its innocent victim, Yankel Rosenbaum, was murdered because he was Jewish, it cannot (yet) be claimed that black anti-Semitism poses a physical danger to Jews. The significance of the phenomenon lies rather in its inclusion in the voice of African America (and in its revelation of what some communal leaders and intellectuals define as civility). It also reveals how much the standards of democratic pluralism have been devalued, and how little some African-

American citizens appreciate the political apothegm of the historian Marvin Meyers: "With talk begins responsibility."<sup>37</sup>

In the shadow of the ideological struggle against fascism and Nazism over half a century ago, the rule became operational that responsible talk would exclude appeals to ethnic and religious prejudice and—later and much more erratically—racial prejudice as well. Take Richard Nixon, for example, who seethed with bigotry and resentment, expressed in so foul an idiom that a smarmy David Mamet character might blush. Yet P (as Nixon is called in *The Haldeman Diaries*) kept his scurrilous opinions of African-Americans, Jews, and Italian-Americans concealed from the public. And while it is undeniable that private feelings can affect or reinforce public positions (e. g., Robert Lansing's Near East strategy, or Nixon's Southern strategy), what counts in a democratic polity is less the prejudices that individuals harbor than their civic stance toward one another.

Though the Hebrew Bible, as the philosopher Hermann Cohen of Marburg pointed out, contains thirty-six injunctions to "love the stranger,"<sup>38</sup> that is a moral ideal that may be impossible to fulfill. The *political* ideal is less demanding, stemming from the question that Tina Turner has posed: What's love got to do with it? Democracy does not in fact demand love; it only demands tolerance, a willingness to share the public space in a spirit of mutual respect.

The tenacity of black anti-Semitism not only violates the conditions of democratic discourse, and not only represents a breach in the pattern that has emerged in the past half a century. It remains also, as August Bebel said of European anti-Semitism a century ago, "the socialism of fools." For Jews exert very little impact on the conditions of African-American life—especially at its most desperate edges. From the year Stone counseled patience until 1984, crime has risen horrendously; "the murder rate among blacks increased 65 percent. A black person is now seven times as likely to be murdered, four times as likely to be raped, three times as likely to be robbed and twice as likely to be assaulted. . . . America's average murder victim is a black boy between the ages of 12 and 15; 95 percent of the time his murderer is another black boy or man." Jesse Jackson's own summation is unsparing: "More young men die each year from gunshots than the total who have died from lynchings in the entire history of the United States. We have become our own worst enemy."<sup>39</sup> Blaming Jews for so appalling a homicide rate, or—for that matter—for any of the other pathologies that make the condition of the African-American underclass so dreadful—is quite beside the point. The arguments of traditional anti-Semitism have never withstood the tests of empirical scrutiny, and the updated version among some African-Americans does not differ from its antecedents in managing to escape from an inherent irrationality.

But even a once-popular rationale for anti-Semitism has become invalid: Jewish merchants, who once had a reputation for price-gouging and exploitation, have been absent from the ghetto for roughly a generation. Their disappearance did not prevent Muhammad, in a speech to an African-American women's club this spring, from calling Jews "blood-suckers of the poor."<sup>40</sup> But it is now the fate of mostly newer immigrant groups like Korean-Americans—whether in Brooklyn or in Los Angeles—to be the targets of resentment and rage.

Since the 1960s some features of African-American life have gone into a tailspin, and it must rankle that other racial minorities have been pushing ahead (without apparently provoking the sale of paranoid tracts denouncing "the yellow peril"). By living up to the imperatives of "this-worldly asceticism" that Max Weber had shown to be the way to wealth in Christendom since the Reformation, Japanese-Americans and Chinese-Americans generally enjoy incomes as high as any ethnic group, scuttling the charge that an unmodulated "racism" accounts for disparities among minorities. In a society where the *balseros* from Cuba were until recently more welcome than Haitian boat people, where Filipino physicians outnumber African-American doctors,<sup>41</sup> and where employers often seem more willing to hire immigrants—including "undocumented" workers—than the descendants of those brought in chains in the Middle Passage, but also where other African-Americans operate near the very top (from the United Nations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Supreme Court to the Senate), "racism" has lost its simple allure as an explanation for incongruities in a multicultural nation. Even if discrimination were miraculously to disappear, it is not clear how attractive or remunerative the jobs would be for the men hanging out at Tally's Corner, or for 44 percent of the black population that, according to an estimate that Gates has circulated, "can't read the front page of a newspaper."<sup>42</sup>

Three decades ago the civil rights movement came close to insisting that it was as simple as black and white. Since then Negroes became blacks and then African-Americans, a designation that also relegates them to another hyphenated minority jostling for its place at the table (above the salt), competing for attention with others who insist upon entitlements in our Culture of Complaint. (The law may now be stretching entitlements to include the obese.)<sup>43</sup> An "identity politics" based heavily upon race has little chance if multiculturalism is taken seriously, because "the problem of the twentieth century" is more than "the problem of the color line." Lines of gender and class and sexual orientation can be traced too, crisscrossing on a planet of dwindling resources. The celebration of multiculturalism has been a mixed blessing to African-Americans, one suspects, because it makes

them look like one group among many, divided by claims sorted out by gender and class (and sexual orientation) as well.

Despite the democratic promise of multiculturalism, its complications may well have intensified the sense of frustration and bitterness and exclusion; and the struggle to express that estrangement, for the most burdened of all minorities, has resolved itself, for some, in only further and more irrational estrangement.

If it is obvious that the virulence of black anti-Semitism cannot be accounted for by damage Jews may have inflicted—any more than the historic racism of, say, Southern whites can be explained by what African-Americans did to *them*, then at least such wild resentment deserves no sympathy grounded in guilt. The histories of African-Americans and American Jews may not mirror each other very much; and it now looks a bit eccentric ever to have believed that their destinies were entwined, that they felt so much in common that they seemed joined at the hip. Irving Berlin, whose earliest childhood memory of Czarist Russia was a pogrom, wrote "God Bless America" (1938) in the same year Langston Hughes lamented that "America never was America to me."<sup>44</sup> But perhaps American Jews must learn what many African-Americans have already known, that the status of victim makes no one humane. Pain need not ennoble, nor does it protect anyone against the temptations of bigotry. Atlantic Records' Jerry Wexler, who grew up in the Great Depression as the son of an immigrant window-washer, has observed in his recent autobiography: "Suffering teaches us only that suffering has absolutely no value." Farrell's novel is also a reminder, if any were needed, that the exiles of the most distressful nation, who confronted not only nativist violence that Know Nothingism sanctioned but also economic discrimination ("No Irish Need Apply"), did not become champions of universal human rights. In our century they sometimes used sticks and stones to keep neighborhoods as bastions of what Jimmy Carter once called "ethnic purity." Even Saul D. Alinsky, an organizer who enjoyed the support of the Roman Catholic Church, found that he could work with either Northern working class Catholics or with working class African-Americans—but not very effectively in tandem. Though his techniques of community building were imaginative enough to be the topic of Hillary Rodham's 1969 Wellesley honors thesis, Alinsky could not reconcile diverse interests within the same class. The gap could not be closed, though both groups had been in their own different ways subjected to what would now be called "hate crimes."<sup>45</sup>

The Jewish defense agencies were created early in the century to combat such evils, perpetrated in this country mostly against African-Americans. Because their plight has been so wrenching, many American Jews made the leap of believing that those who experienced such ordeals

had to be virtuous. Their character was sentimentalized, their spiritual wisdom exaggerated—though doubtless no champion of civil rights ever made so weird a misjudgment as Joel Chandler Harris, who had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a *pro*-slavery text, because a social system that could produce a character as elevated as its eponymous hero could not be all that bad.

But by now it should be clear that the mark of oppression is no sign of moral superiority. After attending a Farrakhan rally in New York City nearly a decade ago, Julius Lester chose not merely to address American Jews when he insisted that "the time has come to stop making apologies for black America, to stop patronizing black America with that paternalistic brand of understanding which excuses and finds reasons for the obscenities of black hatred and black anti-Semitism. . . . Farrakhan is subtly but surely creating an atmosphere in America where hatreds of all kinds will be easier to express openly."<sup>46</sup> The battle against bigotry has thus become even more complicated than earlier in the century, and the history of these two particular minorities has become a tale told by an ironist.

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