
suburban synagogue. I served communities which called themselves Orthodox, Conservative, unaffiliated and new age. I now serve a community which will not even call itself a congregation. I have worked with students in an "average" Canadian university and an exceptional American one. Over and over again, I discover and rediscover the same thing: that "the people" care very little for our intra-communal and inter-movement bickering. They wonder why so little energy is spent on helping them find meaning in their Judaism and their lives and why successful outreach efforts have to struggle so hard for the few dollars they need. I will go further and say that successful outreach efforts are ignored and even punished because their very success is so threatening to the forms of Jewish identity we have created and which all the evidence tells us are no longer working.

The Endless Discovery

Our Jewishness is too rich to waste on political and religious exclusionism. Our knowledge of truth is too limited to be closed to the thinking of others. Our needs for community, for caring and warmth, for nurturance and encouragement, to reconnect with God and to develop spiritually, are too important to permit abandoning them in favor of arguments among elites and protection of turf. If the National Jewish Population Survey teaches us anything, it is that the things we hoped would ensure Jewish survival in North America will not do so.

We need real discussion of the larger purposes of being Jewish which draws on the experiences of those who have been in the field, and "the field" means also

those smaller, more isolated groups of Jews who are already adapting to the new realities of Jewish life. We desperately need to create nurturing communities whose individual members

contribute to the larger society, and we need to talk more about the kind of society toward which we aim as a people covenanted with the God of history.

Last fall, one of our students tried to create a community service program within Hillel which connected with the much larger, campus-wide Dartmouth Community Services program. The easiest day to join the crew which cuts firewood for needy families in our area was, of course, Shabbat. And so began what I hope will

be a very long discussion among those who argue that service others is the highest form of Shabbat observance and those who say that Shabbat must be protected as our day off. And, as someone from an Orthodox background, listening to those who argue in favor of service to others on Shabbat is a wonderful opportunity to examine anew just what Shabbat is and what does religious pluralism really mean and what is a Hillel anyway and how can I sit around praying while others are cold. □

Blacks and Jews

Edward Shapiro

Of the many pieties of American Jewish liberalism, few have been accepted so readily at face value or have been so influential than the assumption that blacks and Jews share vital interests arising out of what the rabbi-historian, Arthur Hertzberg, has described as the "comradeship of excluded peoples". "The truth is that Jews do feel differently vis-a-vis the black community," Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, recently stated. "There is a history, there is a kinship, and it goes beyond the rhetoric. Look, there's never gonna be a crisis in Irish-black relations or Italian-black relations, because they have no relations. But we do."

The most important issue, however, is not whether there is a history and a kinship among blacks and Jews. It is obvious that one exists. Any decent library contains a dozen or so books on the topic, almost all written by Jews. Rather, it is whether the image that Jews have of this history and kinship is based on fact or is a product of their own psychological needs. Relationships which are not grounded in historical, economic and social realities do not facilitate ethnic relationships but deter and complicate them.

Fostering the Jewish Self-Image

Jews have assumed that they, more than any other group of white Americans, could empathize with the plight of blacks. Jews did not commit themselves to the cause of black advancement primarily out of the expectation that this would, in turn, bring social, political, and economic

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benefits to themselves. Rather, it stemmed from their own sense of self. The Jewish community needed blacks to vindicate the myth of Jewish liberalism and to encourage a form of Jewish identity free of religious obscurantism. Those Jews who were more secure in their Jewish identity, such as the Orthodox of Brooklyn, did not require an entente with blacks to answer the question, "what are we." Their Jewish bona fides rested on more substantial grounds.

Jewish leaders argued that the fates of blacks and Jews were intertwined because of their similar historical backgrounds and sociological conditions. Both groups were powerless and victims of persecution. Both included in their ranks martyrs to hatred, Joe Frank in the case of Jews and Emmett Till in the case of blacks. The murder of Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney in Mississippi in 1964 strengthened the presumption that Jews and blacks shared a common destiny. Jewish attitudes towards blacks have developed within the context of this faith in a common history and destiny.

Wishing a New Myth

Jews are deeply anguished by evidence of widespread black anti-Semitism and by the failure of black leaders to forcefully repudiate Louis Farrakhan and other black anti-Semites. This stems not only from their belief that blacks have not shown the proper gratitude for all that Jews have done for them, but also because it casts doubt on an important element of Jewish liberalism--the presumption that Jews and blacks comprise a community of the persecuted.

There is no better example of this mind-set than the response of Jews to "Liberators: Fighting on Two Fronts in World War II", a 1992 PBS documentary movie (and accompanying book) which portrayed the role of black soldiers in liberating Jews from Buchenwald and Dachau in April, 1945. Jewish philanthropists competed for the privilege of paying to distribute copies of the documentary, believing it would help restore the badly frayed black-Jewish liberal coalition.

It soon became clear that "Liberators" was a fraud. Black veterans, survivors and historians denied that black military units had liberated any German concentration camps. Holocaust historians denied that blacks had participated in liberating Buchenwald or Dachau. The American Jewish Committee issued a fifteen-page report which stated that "Liberators" contained "serious factual flaws well beyond what can be written off as 'artistic license'."

This did not prevent the film from winning an Academy Award nomination for best documentary, from

being shown to Jewish audiences, or from being defended by Jews. Nina Rosenblum, the film's co-creator, accused one member of the 761st Tank Battalion, the black unit which supposedly liberated Buchenwald, of being brain-damaged for questioning the film's accuracy, and described whites who would deprive black military units credit for liberating Dachau and Buchenwald as racists. Minor historical errors, she argued, should not detract from the fact that blacks and Jews both fought against racism during World War II.

The conflict between good intentions and historical truth was the theme of an essay by Letty Pogrebin in the May-June, 1993 issue of *Tikkun*. For her, the dispute over "Liberators" mandated a search for truth "at a level deeper than facts". She admitted that "Liberators" was "artistically unnecessary, ethically wrong, and historically indefensible". Nevertheless, the film's fraudulence should not detract from the "deeper" truth of the film, namely, that in the past, blacks have helped Jews just as Jews have helped blacks.

The Differences

In fact, there are deep differences between the history and sociology of America's Jews and blacks, differences which simply cannot be papered over by emphasizing the bonds which should exist between two supposedly oppressed groups. Jews in America have never experienced anything remotely resembling the enslavement and prejudice encountered by American blacks, while blacks never experienced the economic and social prosperity known by Jews. On every possible social and economic indicator, blacks have lagged far behind Jews. Jews, who comprise less than 3% of the American population, make up over 25% of the names on the *Forbes* magazine annual listing of the 400 richest Americans. Blacks, in contrast, who constitute over 11% of the population, had only one name on the 1992 *Forbes* list. Blacks are still waiting for one of their number to be selected to head one of America's elite universities, while Jews (or half-Jews) have already served as the presidents of Princeton, Dartmouth (twice), Columbia, Yale, Harvard, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of California at Berkeley. Jews and blacks are hardly similarly "excluded peoples".

**The Jewish community
needed blacks to
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It is not surprising that blacks and Jews, coming from different points on the economic and social compass, view reality differently, or that blacks often disappoint Jews. Jews are shocked and disappointed by recent polls which reveal that 63% of New York City's blacks believed that Jews have too much influence in the city and that blacks are twice as likely to hold anti-Semitic views as other Americans. Are these results so surprising? Is it really so strange that blacks would see Jews as part of the undifferentiated mass of whites who are hostile to blacks? It is so odd that blacks, after contrasting their economic and social status with that of Jews (or Asians), would be envious and bitter, or that they would consider Jewish success a reproach to their own lagging social and economic mobility?

Shattering the Myth

Some Jews would rather have us believe that contemporary black anti-Semitism is an aberration caused by the social and economic problems of the Reagan-Bush era. They perceive the years prior to 1967 as a golden age of black-Jewish cooperation. Actually the relationship had never been marked by equality. Blacks had been the employees, tenants, debtors, students and welfare supplicants, while Jews had been their employers, landlords, creditors, teachers and welfare supervisors. Jews had done things *for* blacks rather than *with* blacks. For blacks, the most important thing about Jews was that they were white and in positions of authority, not that Jews were benefactors of blacks or that Jews viewed themselves as the benefactors of blacks.

Black-Jewish relations can never be on a sound footing as long as Jews remain wedded to this racial mythology. On a whole host of issues, the interests of Jews and blacks diverge. As Michael Meyers, a perceptive black leader, recently suggested, Jews should face the "tough realities. It's true that Jews and blacks have been allies, but we've also been rivals."

The myth of the comradeship of excluded peoples harms Jews as well as blacks. It makes it quite difficult for Jews to recognize their elevated social and economic status within American society. Jews wildly exaggerate the extent of American anti-Semitism, and vote as if they still had the economic and social profile of their grandparents. The myth also harms blacks by reinforcing their self-image as victims. This self-image, as Myron Magnet's recent book, *The Dream and the Nightmare*, stresses, has infected many blacks with a mood of hopelessness which discourages them from taking advantage of educational and economic opportunities.

Building a Solid Foundation for Alliance

This does not mean that Jews and blacks should sever their ties. They do have interests in common, albeit they are not based on a shared history of victimization. Both groups are overwhelmingly urban and share a stake in the future of the American city. Both share an interest in foreign affairs, Jews in Israel and blacks in Africa. Both share, or at least should share, an interest in removing the remnants of discrimination and in creating a society free of all distinction based on ethnicity, race, and religion. The Jewish-black alliance need not be discarded, but certainly the basis on which it has rested should be reformulated to comport with reality. □

Breaking the silence: rabbinic sexual misconduct

Arthur Gross Schaefer

We have allowed a conspiracy of denial and silence to surround charges of rabbinic sexual misconduct. Whether out of a sense of misplaced loyalty to a particular rabbi, out of a belief that airing one's dirty laundry in public will hurt the Jewish community or out of the dangerous presumption that abuse by rabbis does not take place, our religious institutions have been reluctant to take any action or even to engage in serious discussion about this complicated issue.

Many other religious denominations have taken a lead in creating safer congregations through the development of detailed guidelines and effective adjudicative procedures. We need to begin a public discussion which involves rabbis, other Jewish professionals and lay leaders to review the causes and develop a comprehensive strategy that will promote healthy and safe relationships between congregants and rabbis.

My involvement in this area initially followed a scandal involving a very popular local minister. As more and more women congregants come forward to tell their stories, there were the early reactions of outrage, disbelief and denial. The game of 'blame the victim' was soon in full swing as the congregants, who had the courage to come forward, were seen as the ones who were at fault by making their revelations. However, the

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