

## Brief Communications

### Reevaluating Jewish Opposition to Reverse Discrimination — in the Aftermath of the Andrew Young Affair

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*"We are faced with an imminent period whereby a combination of black charlatans and white neurotics will sow a scene of disillusionment and bitterness, a scene which will provide a comforting rationale for all racial bigots, both black and white."\**

Although several Black spokesmen have indicated that the Jewish position on affirmative action was the fuel that fed the Andy Young fire, that demonstrably is not the case at all. Animosity toward Jews was a significant factor in Black life in the United States long before affirmative action became a subject of public controversy. Indeed even after the *DeFunis* and *Bakke* cases had become part of legal history Black hostility toward Jews was expressed in avenues unrelated to the issues of those cases. Logically it would make no sense at all to suggest that a moratorium be declared on Jewish organizational opposition to preferential treatment and quotas until such time as Black anti-Semitism subsides. The Jewish position of affirmative action did not cause Black anti-Semitism nor will its disappearance assuage Black hostility toward Jews. It would make as little sense to advocate that American Jews try to improve their relationships with Blacks by calling upon the President to name Andrew Young Secretary of State or to call upon Israel to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization. There is simply no relationship between the rhetoric and the facts.

The existence of anti-Semitic attitudes among Blacks has deep roots. It is complex and is far more serious than the Andy Young debacle would suggest.

Before there was an Andy Young episode igniting Jewish-Black relations, a number of highly relevant and significant findings con-

cerning this relationship were published in the "Study of Attitudes Toward Racial and Religious Minorities and Toward Women," by Louis Harris (November 1978).

#### Prejudice Towards Jews

His study found that among all non-Jewish Americans there has been no significant decrease in negative stereotypes about Jews during a measured two-year period. On the other hand, by a contrast that is startling there has been a major drop in the number of non-Jews who believe in positive stereotypes about Jews. For example, the proportion of non-Jews who believe that "Jews have suffered from persecution through the centuries" has dropped dramatically from 87% to 75% in two years. Similarly, the proportion of non-Jews who believe that "the same people who would like to keep the Jews down would also like to keep other minorities down" has dropped 13 points from 75% to 62%. The report observes, with respect to the total American population, that "overt anti-Semitism has not grown," but non-Jews more than ever are convinced that Jews have it made "and they are not really in much need of having allies in the non-Jewish community to fight anti-Semitism when it might appear."

Against that background of non-Jewish perceptions the study observes that "Blacks tend to be more anti-Jewish than any other group." That observation must be examined most carefully because it disputes the temptation to dismiss recent anti-Jewish statements as the utterance of demagogues who are seized with the opportunism of the moment.

\* Saul Alinsky, "The Double Revolution," *Civil Rights Digest* (Spring 1971).

In view of the fact that the Lou Harris study observes that the percentage of all Americans who express "a rather deep empathy for the problems Jews have faced for many years and their struggle to overcome prejudice and discrimination" has dropped significantly, it is all the more starkly disquieting to see the significantly greater anti-Jewish attitudes among Blacks as compared to non-Jewish Whites. For example, in response to the statement, "When it comes to choosing between people and money, Jews will choose money," 32% of the non-Jewish Whites agree whereas a majority, 56%, of the Blacks agree. Not without significance is the marked contrast in the reaction to the statement, "Most of the slum lords are Jewish." Only 17% of the non-Jewish Whites agree, but 41% of the Blacks concur.

Even more disquieting is the study's findings with respect to the attitudes of American leaders toward Jews. As the report points out "There is still a lingering strain of anti-Semitism that is not far below the surface among all leaders in the United States in the late 1970's as is indeed the case with the public." The leadership is not enlightened. Even more serious are the overwhelmingly negative attitudes of Black leaders toward Jews. For example, while the study found that 54% of corporate leaders feel that "Jews are irritating because they are too aggressive," that view is supported by a greater 65% of national Black leaders. With respect to the statement, "When it comes to choosing between people and money, Jews will choose money," 49% of the corporated leaders concurred, but a walloping 81% of national Black leaders agreed. Even more startling, is the finding that 67% of the national Black leaders believe that "Most of the slum lords are Jewish."

Clearly, most of the anti-Jewish attitudes expressed by Blacks in general and national Black leaders in particular are unrelated to any apparent consideration of affirmative action. One, conceivably, may argue that these strong anti-Jewish attitudes represent displaced hostility against Jews resulting from Jewish

opposition to affirmative action. But does the argument hold up in the light of previous research?

#### **Anti-Jewish Prejudice Among Blacks: A Recent Phenomenon?**

In 1969, the ADL published "The Tenacity of Prejudice," a study of "Anti-Semitism in Contemporary America" by Gertrude Selznick and Stephen Steinberg. That study reports attitudes of a decade ago, long before affirmative action became a subject of national controversy. In general, the study found that views of the uneducated and the elderly are more marked on every anti-Semitic belief which was examined. By marked contrast the study revealed that "No such statement can be made about Negroes who are more anti-Semitic with respect to certain beliefs only." On an "index of economic anti-Semitism" the study observed that 54% of Negroes in contrast to 32% of Whites held anti-Semitic attitudes. Even more profoundly disturbing, and challenging, is the finding that "Negroes continue to be higher on economic anti-Semitism even when compared to Whites at the same education level." For example, among those with some college education more than twice as many Blacks as Whites have anti-Semitic attitudes on economic matters. (Economic prejudices were determined by such test statements as "Control international banking" and "Shrewd and tricky in business.") Even among college graduates 18% of the Blacks surveyed expressed economic anti-Semitism as compared to 10% of the Whites.

Perhaps the greatest threat or challenge contained in the study was the finding that although younger Whites in general are less anti-Semitic than the elderly, this is not true for Blacks. In the words of the study: "One of the more striking findings with regard to Negroes, and one that is consistent with the view that Negro anti-Semitism is rising, is that acceptance of anti-Semitic beliefs is disproportionately high in the youngest as well as the oldest age group. Whereas only 17% of Whites

under 35 scored as anti-Semitic, among Negroes the figure is 49%. This section of the study concludes "Though young Negroes are more educated than older Negroes, they are no less anti-Semitic."

#### **Jewish Attitudes Towards Blacks**

The intolerance which many Blacks have toward Jews is reciprocated to some extent by the attitudes of Jews toward Blacks. For example, although the Lou Harris survey determined that a 60% majority of Jews perceive that Blacks live in inferior housing to Whites, 46% of all Jews indicate that they would be upset if Blacks moved into their neighborhoods. This contrasts with only 39% of all Whites expressing the same negative attitude toward neighborhood integration. But housing is not the only field in which Jewish attitudes toward Blacks is more negative than that of the total White population. For example, 21% of all Jews would not like to see their children attend schools with Blacks, but only 14% of all Whites expressed the same negative attitude. It is not surprising, therefore, that, according to the Lou Harris survey, 63% of all Jews oppose full integration for Blacks, as compared with 58% of all Whites.

#### **Black Leaders vs. Black Rank and File**

One of the least recognized, but most challenging dilemmas is the dichotomy that exists between the priorities of national Black leaders and the priorities of the Black rank and file in the United States. We are keenly cognizant of the views of Black leaders. Indeed, if we respond positively to them we may still not be addressing the major needs and demands of the vast majority of Black people in the United States. One of the most significant examples is the finding in the Lou Harris survey that two-thirds of the Blacks stated that they want full integration in American society. By marked contrast, a minority of the Black leaders (only 45%) indicated that their rank and file favor integration. Similarly, it is important to note that while 55% of all of the national Black

leaders feel that elected Black officials are "very effective" only 41% of the rank and file Blacks share that conclusion. Further light is cast upon the nature of Black leadership by the finding that only 15% of the national Black leaders and 19% of the rank and file feel that Black militants are "very effective."

Along with the dichotomy between leadership and rank and file, it is important to recognize the tangible priorities of the Black community, in addition to the goal of full integration. When asked to volunteer what they felt are major problems facing Blacks today, 57% of the national Black leaders put "better education, better motivation of children and teachers" in first place. Only 34% of them gave top listing to "lack of jobs, unemployment." In stark contrast, the Black rank and file reversed the order with 43% giving top priority to "lack of jobs and unemployment" and only 30% listing "better job training and education."

There is, however, a very high rate of agreement between leaders and rank and file in the Black community on the subject of housing integration. Integrated neighborhoods are preferred by 69% of the national Black leaders and 68% of the rank and file.

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

For more than a decade, if indeed not longer, most Blacks have perceived most Jews as different from other American Whites in having worse attitudes toward Blacks. Why is this so?

In addressing ourselves to the Black community and to the reality of its attitudes it is essential to recognize that we are not simply dealing with a racial community. We are also dealing with a religious community—a community made up preponderantly of Christians. The Christian Church has played an enormously important institutional role in Black life in America. Its preachers and its teachers have been singularly influential in the shaping of Black life in America.

The seeds of anti-Semitism which are found in the New Testament have been no less

influential in molding the attitudes of Black Christians toward Jews than they have been in influencing the attitudes of White Christians toward Jews. Indeed, because of the importance and influence of Black churches they may have been all the more influential.

With a ground thus made fertile for contemporary anti-Semitic attitudes it became easy for the Black job seeker to perceive the Jewish boss as being unattractively different from the Christian boss. So, too, were his perceptions distorted with respect to the labor union official, the landlord and the shopkeeper. The religious sources of Black anti-Semitism need to be addressed more effectively than heretofore.

There is a manifest need to enlarge and intensify our interfaith programs and projects with the Black churches. From seminaries to Sunday school lessons, the entire range of subject matter affecting attitudes toward Jews should be given higher priority than it has enjoyed heretofore.

The opportunistic demagoguery demonstrated by certain Black spokesmen must be recognized for what it is and not ascribed to what it is not. Research shows that militants do not enjoy favor among the vast majority of the Black community. The problems that they are creating should be dealt with in the same tried and true ways that Jewish defense agencies have used so effectively in the past in isolating the anti-Semitism espoused by bigots who are white.

If we are to deal with reality rather than rhetoric we must recognize the priorities on the Black agenda: 1) full integration; 2) full employment; and 3) integrated housing and integrated education. If we wish to be effective in these areas and if our efforts are to be given

credence by the Black community, there is a great need for self-education and participation by the total Jewish community. Statements and gallant efforts by Jewish leadership alone will not suffice nor will it be persuasive as far as the majority of the Black community is concerned. If we wish to avoid the appearance of merely posturing, we must place high among our priorities large-scale, continuing efforts to provide full employment, expand equal housing opportunities and integrate our schools.

The inaccurate perception of the Jewish community, as revealed by the public opinion surveys, must be corrected. The precipitous drop in positive Jewish stereotypes is a clear danger sign. The public image of the Jewish community as "having it made" has the tragic consequence of making it appear that we do not need allies to fight anti-Jewish discrimination. We need to institute a reinvigorated, direct approach to the problem of anti-Jewish discrimination and we must assert our proper demands for intervention by government civil rights agencies.

Finally, enlarged efforts must be made at the grass roots level to diminish abusive practices by merchants, landlords, employers and local labor union officials who interface with the Black rank and file to whatever extent these practices may exist. It is inherent in human nature for the victim of such practices to enlarge upon the particular unfortunate experience and ascribe the unpleasantness to all members of the wrongdoer's group. This, perhaps, is the most difficult challenge of all but it is at the face-to-face level of individual contact where human relations begins and ends.