

BLACKS AND JEWS: NEW ENEMIES?

What Is the Problem?

After the Andrew Young resignation, the mass media declared that a state of war existed between the Jewish and Black communities. Now, it seems as though the media gave a war -- and nobody came.

However, there were some uneasy days; and some reasons for that uneasiness which still exist. The chronology:

.On the organization level, the Jews and Blacks were closely allied in the 1930s and 1940s, both engaged in a fight for economic security; and both targets of Nazi racism.

.On the "street" level, there grew certain tensions between sectors of Blacks and Jews based on economic conflict. The Jews, having just made it, became the landlords and small merchants for Blacks. The studies showed about as much anti-semitism among Blacks as among whites.

.On the organization level, the Jews and Blacks were closely allied in the civil rights fight of the 1950s and early 1960s. At the very least, Jews recognized that a society with civil rights is the kind of society which is good for Jews.

.On the organization level, Jews and Blacks started losing touch in the mid-1960s because Blacks wanted to establish their own leadership -- and because there developed differences between some Jewish and Black organizations on the subject of "quotas."

.On the "street" level, there grew another kind of economic tension between Blacks and Jews. Jewish landlords and shopkeepers were disappearing from Black neighborhoods; the new tension was on the middle class level, where the Blacks were rapidly increasing, and the Jews were highly visible. Involved in such occupational tension were teachers, public administrators and professional training schools. The quota issue became symbolic of those tensions.

Because of these economic tensions, the Jewish and Black communities of San Francisco were scheduling special talks *before* the Andrew Young resignation. When that event broke, around the subject of the PLO, anger at the Jews seemed to burst from a few sectors of the Black community. That was when the media declared a state of war.

However, when the Black-Jewish talks proceeded in San Francisco, it became very clear that the interest of the Black community was not in the PLO, but still in economic issues. The bubble burst for Jesse Jackson and some others who tried to build a Black campaign around the PLO.

However, the economic tensions did remain. Especially disturbing were tendencies to *single out* the Jews as the enemy -- although the Jews obviously were not the major part of the competition which faced middle class Blacks; nor the major part of the opposition to quota systems. Such *singling-out* of the Jews as the *symbolic* enemy, is the very essence of anti-semitism.

The organized discussions with the Black community pinpointed this danger. Jewish and Black leadership in San Francisco formally agreed that the two groups have more in common than in dispute; e.g., they both are the targets of such as the KKK and Nazis. However, the economic tension is still there. It will increase with the economic crunch. If a crisis develops around Israel which seems to further afflict America's troubled economy, perhaps by way of oil, then Jews will doubly fit the "scapegoat" role, for both whites and Blacks: both as visible Jews in competitive middle class positions; and as the group whose support of Israel got the U.S. in further economic plight. The Black community will never spearhead such organized anti-semitism -- but if many Blacks are caught up in such a syndrome, if they are not on our side in such a situation, then we will indeed know we are in trouble.

What Needs to Be Done?

We need to continue dialogue with the Black community, to remind them of our common enemies ... We need to join with them, and others, to reduce those situations which create economic tensions among groups ... We need to have America's political figures emphasize to the public that support of Israel is not a Jewish question but an American question, in the national interest ... We need to have strong Jewish communal institutions so that we can be as persuasive as possible on that score.

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