

JESSE JACKSON AND THE PLO

Jesse Jackson is a media event whose influence in the black community is only an inch deep.

*All of the black Congressmen from California, including Ron Dellums across the Bay, have taken public issue with Jesse Jackson and his position on the PLO.* Black Congressman Julian Dixon said: "I personally feel the PLO is a terrorist organization. There's a need for diplomatic initiative, but only if the PLO recognizes Israel and agrees to cease and desist from terrorist actions."

And black Congressman Gus Hawkins said: "The U.S. shouldn't establish contacts with the PLO. It's pretty significant that the Black Caucus has not rushed out with any support statement for Jackson and the SCLC. Until the PLO recognizes Israel's right to exist, we undermine the negotiating process by giving them some support."

Many other people are concerned about Jackson's nose-rubbing with Arafat these days. But they would be making a terrible mistake if they equate Jesse Jackson with the "black community." Such equations tend to become self-fulfilling.

What are the facts about the black community? The latest polls, even after the furor of the Young resignation, show that American blacks favor Israel over the Arabs by a 3-1 ratio. That is only slightly less than the rest of the American population. And the blacks, like other Americans, disfavor the PLO even more than they disfavor other Arabs. In passing, current polls also show that about 80 per cent of American blacks have positive feelings towards American Jews.

To put it in an even more practical way: the black Congressmen have always voted for Israel in a much higher ratio than white Congressmen have. In one vote of recent memory, involving aid for Israel, the margin of victory in the House of Representatives

was 34 votes; and 14 of those votes were from black Congressmen. If they had reversed their votes, the margin of victory would have been 6 votes, never mind other Congressmen they might have influenced.

And while Jesse Jackson jumped on the Andrew Young resignation immediately by accusing the Jews of being responsible, the great majority of both blacks and whites rejected that notion.

However, while most Americans, black and white, remain overwhelmingly favorable towards Israel, and overwhelmingly unfavorable towards the PLO, most of them now favor "negotiations with the PLO." How did that come about?

It came about in the usual way: signals from the White House. Most Americans -- as unsophisticated on the Middle East as most of us are on, say, Afghanistan -- take their cues on Middle East strategy from the establishment in Washington D.C. They sense the current belief of the White House establishment that it would be strategically in American national interest to negotiate with the PLO. The administration, *not* Jesse Jackson, nor any other black personality, has been shaping American opinion in this direction.

Although the administration is still formally stuck with its commitment that it will not recognize the PLO until the PLO recognizes Israel, it has been sending out signals to the contrary, and the American public is astute enough to pick them up. Besides, Americans are used to the idea that you talk with your adversaries. That's what politics is all about.

We could drop a quarter of a billion leaflets over the United States, pointing out that the PLO is the war party, the anti-American party, even the anti-Palestinian party in the Middle East. We could buy prime time on all the TV networks, pointing

out that to give official status to such a PLO *before* it makes any commitments, would be plain dumb. But none of that would do much good. We have to convince our public officials that *they* have to tell all to the public.

Of course, Jesse Jackson doesn't agree with us, and is serving as a stalking horse for the administration position. But Jesse Jackson, who will be in San Francisco soon, is *not* the black community, and should not be confused with it. He gained much attention in the black community by arguing charismatically that black children should work harder in the schools. But he has no special black constituency in general or on the Middle East; and no one wants to drive such a constituency towards him.

The objective, therefore, is *not* to attack Jackson in a way that will thrust him into leadership, but to attack any misbegotten ideas on the PLO, as expressed by him or anyone else. And to remember that the major attention has to be given to Washington D.C., from which these misbegotten ideas most influentially emanate.