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### JEW AND BLACKS IN THE 1984 U.S. ELECTION

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*Anathema to Jews, Boost to Blacks / Anti-Semitic Slurs / Other Candidates Respond / 'New Right' Eclipses Jackson / Gradual Polarization / Is There Still Basis for Alliance? / Conclusions*

"Jews cast dark shadow on Jackson's dream," proclaimed the headline running across the entire top of a page of a story in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the city's only black newspaper. The assessment was in response to the effort of Jesse Jackson to become the first significant black leader to seek the presidential nomination of a major party in the U.S. In throwing his hat into the ring, the former civil rights activist set into motion another in a series of black-Jewish confrontations that have pitted blacks against Jews in recent years.

#### ANATHEMA TO JEWS, BOOST TO BLACKS

Jackson had emerged as a source of concern to Jews not only for his highly publicized meeting and embrace of Yasser Arafat in 1979 (shortly after the controversy that followed the resignation of Andrew Young as U. S. ambassador to the United Nations), but in subsequent years for a number of verbal attacks on Jews, criticism of Israel, acceptance of Arab money, and support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. His candidacy, however, sparked an enthusiastic response from virtually all elements in the black community, and became a source of community pride, in the way that John F. Kennedy's 1960 entry into the race for president bolstered the self-image of Roman Catholics. In the months that followed Jackson's announcement and during the Democratic primaries, black registration jumped by nearly 2 million from what it had been in 1980, to about 12 million. Thus, overnight, Jackson became a force to be reckoned

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with in the Democratic Party . . . although in the course of his campaign he failed to capture a majority of white voters in any state primary. (He won only in the District of Columbia, which is heavily black.)

Jackson's popularity stemmed also from his skill in debating and his ability to focus attention on the problems of the poor and neglected in the United States and elsewhere. This appeal to blacks and other ethnic and social outsiders (which Jackson called his "rainbow coalition") was so powerful that many elected black officials who otherwise might have been cool to this new "king of the hill" felt compelled to support him, or at least to remain neutral and friendly. This was especially worrisome to most Jews since it seemed to provide broader support for political or ideological positions seen as essentially hostile to Jewish interests.

Apart from Jackson's ability to syphon off votes from the other Democratic party aspirants, he worried many party leaders because of his left-leaning views, the anger these evoked among Jews, and the matter of his race—all of which seemed to threaten the delicate balance of diverse and sometimes conflicting groups that have come to comprise the Democratic Party. Early in his campaign, Jackson sought to minimize his difficulties with Jews by meeting with the few who would sit down with him. In these meetings, he reiterated his support for the existence of Israel as a sovereign state, and called for working out differences between Israel and its neighbors on the basis of fairness for all sides. Denying that he was anti-Semitic, Jackson advocated reactivating the old black-Jewish alliance, particularly on domestic or urban issues. This appeal to Jews got lost, however, as the primary campaigns heated up and his underlying political ideology began to surface. He denounced Israel for allegedly selling military hardware to South Africa, charging that such arms were being used "to shoot down and oppress black people." This seemed to take on added force when, in the midst of his campaign, he went off to Syria where he was successful in securing the release of a downed American flyer.

#### ANTI-SEMITIC SLURS

Jackson's "Jewish problem" was exacerbated further by a remark he made in private conversation which was reported in the *Washington Post* in mid-February. He referred to Jews as "Hymies," and to New York City, with its large Jewish population, as "Hymietown." At first he was unwilling to acknowledge the remark; but amid a flurry of criticism, Jackson finally admitted to having said it in casual conversation and apologized. He told one audience, "I categorically deny that I am an anti-Semite."

The reverberations from this incident had hardly died down when Jackson was again embroiled in controversy, following a report published in the *Chicago Tribune* of a radio broadcast on March 11 by Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Black Muslims. A close ally of Jackson's, and sometimes used by him to "warm up" black audiences, Farrakhan described Hitler as a "great man." Late in June, Farrakhan again set the pot boiling when in a broadcast, he referred to Judaism as "a gutter religion" and described Israel and its supporters as being engaged in "a criminal conspiracy." Following the Hitler reference, Jackson indicated it was sufficient to "dissociate" himself from his ally's remark but that he would not personally "repudiate" Farrakhan.

From the outset of his campaign, Jewish religious and civic bodies were concerned about Jackson because of his well-known record. They were slow to speak out publicly against him, though, for fear that they would be seen as becoming enmeshed in politics and, in the words of Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, "lest we fan the flames of a (black-Jewish) confrontation."

Farrakhan's comments and Jackson's hesitation to challenge him, however, opened the floodgates of open and sharp Jewish disapproval. Nathan Perlmutter, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, initiated this when he told the League's national commission on May 31, "Let me say it plainly: we are dealing with a person whose recorded expressions are those of an anti-Semite." He warned that if the Democratic Party did not repudiate Jackson's statements on Jews and his positions on Jewish issues, the party could forfeit its historic Jewish support in the election. This view was soon echoed by other Jewish leaders. Farrakhan came under sharp criticism, also, by such church and civic groups as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Council of Churches, and National Council of Catholic Bishops. The U. S. Senate passed a resolution condemning Farrakhan's remarks. While many blacks, too, were put off by Jackson's statements, there was nevertheless a tendency to feel he was being unfairly attacked because of his race, which led to blacks rallying around him further.

#### OTHER CANDIDATES RESPOND

Jackson's candidacy and the furor it aroused raised the question of how the other political candidates and the major parties would respond. This posed no problem for the Republicans, who had won some 39 percent of the normally Democratic Jewish vote in the 1980 election and were now seeking to extend their gains to a major realignment of American politics. For the Democrats, however, the issue was more complex. Blacks were the single most loyal group in the Democratic coalition. The party's task was to hold onto them and bring even larger numbers to the polls while, at the same time, not to alienate the other elements in their electoral base. Under heavy pressure now, especially from Jewish organizations, a statement was made by Walter F. Mondale, the front-runner for the Democratic nomination and soon to be its candidate. Declaring, on June 26, that Farrakhan's recent remarks were "venomous, bigoted and obscene," Mondale called on Jackson to repudiate the Black Muslim leader. Jackson, however, stood his ground. From Havana, where he had gone to meet Premier Fidel Castro, he said, "I don't understand the context of it [Farrakhan's remarks]. I feel no obligation to respond to it." Some days later, he disavowed them as "reprehensible and morally indefensible," although he did not address the "gutter religion" statement.

As the two party conventions neared, the Republicans pressed their advantage. A resolution denouncing anti-Semitism was quickly adopted. Although the Democratic convention did not adopt a similar resolution (subsequently Mondale got the Democratic National Committee to do so), and although it relented slightly in its previous opposition to racial quotas as part of affirmative action programs, the Democrats were seeking to put greater distance between Jackson and the Democratic Party. The platform committee overwhelmingly defeated a proposal by the Jackson forces (1) to approve the establishment of a Palestinian state and (2) to oppose moving the American embassy to Jerusalem.

#### 'NEW RIGHT' ECLIPSES JACKSON

During the convention, Jackson delivered a graceful and conciliatory speech admitting mistakes he had made during the primaries, and noting that Jews and blacks "are bound by shared blood and shared sacrifices." After his speech at the convention, though, Jackson and the issues he had raised were less in the public eye for the rest of the campaign. Jackson, himself, campaigned only fitfully for the Mondale-Ferraro ticket. For Jews, concern about Jackson was replaced by new fears about the intrusion of religion into politics. Reagan fueled Jewish anxieties about "Christianizing" America by his wooing of Roman Catholics with his attacks on abortion and support for silent prayer in the public schools. Reagan's platform on these issues was aimed at his core constituency of more conservative, evangelical Protestants. Among Jews, then, fears of Jackson and his role in the Democratic Party were eclipsed by even greater fears of Jerry Falwell, head of the Moral Majority, and others on the Christian and New Right.

In the end Reagan won a sweeping victory; the only religio-ethnic groups that failed to give him a majority of their votes were Jews, blacks, and Mexican-Americans. For the second time in eight years, according to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll, a majority of Roman Catholics voted for Reagan while, it was estimated, 18 to 19 percent of "Born-again" white Christians—a group that had significantly helped Democrat Jimmy Carter in his 1976 victory—turned to the GOP. Blacks supported Mondale by a margin of 89 percent, according to ABC News; while several television-newspaper exit polls showed Jews giving him somewhere between 31 to 35 percent of their votes. These figures were challenged by the National Jewish Coalition, a grouping of Jewish Republican and Reagan supporters, who argued that this more detailed exit polling gave the President 40 percent, or more, of Jewish voters. Whatever the figures, the Administration in Washington owed very little, at least politically, to blacks and Jews on the basis of the 1984 election returns.

This raised important questions as to how the two groups would relate to the Administration in Washington. The White House door appeared clearly locked to mainstream organizations like the NAACP and Urban League and there were few black conservatives. As for Jews, their vote was still of interest to Republicans. However, the manner in which the church-state issue came forward during the campaign suggested that the views of Reagan's new, hard-core conservatives (who were far more numerous than blacks and Jews) were now a greater force and would undoubtedly be heard from increasingly, particularly at election time.

#### GRADUAL POLARIZATION

Beneath the surface of the 1984 election, and the emergence of Jackson as a new political force, lay broader issues affecting the future relationship between blacks and Jews. Long seen as traditional allies by virtue of their common minority status and partnership in the liberal coalition, there have been increasing indications that their relationship has been considerably more complicated. Even at the height of their alliance, there was antagonism stemming from landlord-tenant and merchant-consumer relationships in the slums, and, among blacks, the leadership role Jews had taken in civil rights affairs. These had been pushed beneath the surface for the sake of the common cause. In recent years, rising black consciousness has brought to the fore greater hostility to Jews and to Israel. In a 1981 Yankelovich survey, as William Schneider has noted in the *National Journal*, white non-Jews came out 35 percent "highly favorable" and 25 percent "unfavorable" on an index of their attitudes toward Israel. Blacks, however, were 20 percent "highly favorable" and 35 percent "unfavorable." Indeed, blacks were the least favorable of any major subgroup in this population. (Blacks, however, are not anti-Israel. They still support Israel by a margin of 2-1 but this is considerably smaller than the almost 5-1 pro-Israel sympathy among whites.) And while anti-Semitism has been declining over the past twenty years among non-Jewish whites, this has not been the case among blacks. Most troubling of all are indications that anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiments are strongest among younger, better educated and more politically aware blacks.

In the months following the election, Jackson and Farrakhan continued to find favor among black student groups on campuses. Farrakhan was a frequent visitor to colleges and universities. He was even invited to give the commencement address to the June graduation class of a Berkeley (California) high school. (The invitation was later withdrawn.) At the University of Pennsylvania, an acrimonious debate between Jewish and black students took place in the columns of the campus newspaper, revolving around the role of Jackson and Farrakhan and the future of the black-Jewish alliance. The current president and two past ones of the Black Student Union declared in an article, "Black-Jewish Coalition Cannot Be,"

“when two groups of unequal power come together at a bargaining table, the final analysis finds the more powerful group coming away with all the benefits. Historically, self-interest has motivated any alliance between Jews and blacks.”

Strong support by blacks for quotas, to gain broader involvement in the society, continues to keep the two groups apart.

We have less hard information about Jewish views of blacks. The limited data available suggests that, while racist attitudes certainly exist among Jews, the latter are considerably more likely to vote for black candidates than are non-Jewish voters. This was evident in elections in California, Chicago and Philadelphia in recent years. It may be significant, however, that the Jewish margin for the black candidates in these campaigns dropped from 75 percent to just over 40 and then to 32 percent, as the country moved closer to 1984 and Jackson seemed to polarize the two groups.

As the rhetoric of the 1984 election year faded, however, there were signs that the black-Jewish alliance was still alive. It seems to thrive especially on Capitol Hill in Washington, where getting elected and the give-and-take of political bargaining leave less room for political or ideological posturing. Black and Jewish members of Congress have teamed up most recently to add a series of provisions to the House version of the Export Administration Act (which would substantially limit U. S. economic relations with South Africa) and in support for aid to Israel packages. Black congressmen were strong opponents of the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia a few years earlier. There has been little indication that elected black officials are overly excited about sharing political power with Jackson who seemed more interested in using it for himself rather than for a broader black movement. Moderate voices on both sides have been increasingly heard now in the communities to put back together the troubled black-Jewish relationship, especially since growing violence directed toward blacks in South Africa returned an older-style and unifying issue to prominence at year's end.

#### IS THERE STILL BASIS FOR ALLIANCE?

While cooperation between blacks and Jews continues on a number of issues, a real question exists about the nature of any future black-Jewish collaboration. The old alliance took shape earlier in the century when both groups were outsiders in the society and facing in varying degrees many common forms of prejudice and discrimination. The two groups have moved ahead but at different rates of speed.

In some respects, too, the civil rights revolution has been won; the days of blacks being victimized by brutal Southern sheriffs are largely over. The issues today, especially for blacks at the lower end of the social-economic scale, tend to lie more in the areas of economic development and in dealing with the effects of past discrimination and disadvantage. This may call for both groups to give greater consideration, in the years ahead, to a number of proposals coming mainly (though not exclusively) from the conservative side of the political spectrum, including: experiments with school tuition and housing vouchers; tax rebates and other forms of assistance for enterprise zones in urban depressed areas; temporary sub-minimum wages for teenagers during summer, so as to gain experience in the work world; and proposals to permit tenants in public housing projects to purchase their units. Whether any or all of these will work is by no means clear, but, for the most part, neither blacks nor Jews have proven themselves able to venture out from the New Deal, Fair Deal and Great Society policies and traditional civil rights strategies that guided the alliance in the past. Moreover, there are battles that, for the most part, only blacks can fight—such as the high rates of crime in slums, and family disorientation (in 1978 some 83 percent of children born to black teenagers were out of wedlock).

## CONCLUSIONS

The 1984 election and the broader trends referred to above make it clear that both groups have undergone considerable change since the historic march on Washington in 1963 when Jews, along with blacks, heard Martin Luther King's dream of a society open to all. Jews are still a prototypical liberal group; a survey by Steven Cohen, published by the American Jewish Committee after the election, reported this to be so on a wide variety of issues. But there is little question that the passion has cooled down, following the urban dislocations of the 1960s and, especially, the anxieties stirred by the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars. With a substantial portion of the Jewish vote going to the Republican presidential candidate in the last two national elections (an estimated one-third to two-fifths), Cohen finds indications that younger Jews are growing more conservative. He sees evidence of this in the expansion of the National Jewish Coalition led by Richard Fox of Philadelphia, and a generally younger group of more conservative activists; and in the break by several influential Jewish intellectuals, such as Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer and Joseph Epstein, with their liberal-left past. For the first time since the arrival of Eastern European Jews in the United States, a respectable conservative movement is taking shape in the Jewish community. However, as Deborah Lipstadt, Charles Fruitt and Jonathan Woocher have suggested recently, and as shown in the recent election, "there is still a considerable gap between identifying as a conservative and identifying as a Republican."

Blacks, it is clear, are becoming a force of greater social and political consequence, especially in the big cities of America. In Philadelphia, not only is the mayor black but also the managing director of the city, the school superintendent, the president of the city council and the chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court (who is a Philadelphian). Newer and younger black leaders coming on the scene did not personally experience the common struggles of Jews and blacks. Many—though by no means all—tend to see Jews as a group that has "made it" and, indeed, as part of a broader white community power structure that has proved to be oppressive. In periods of racial calm, Jews and blacks continue to be able to work together, but these periods have become less frequent in recent years. New York City is soon to hold its mayoral election, in which the city's contentious Mayor Ed Koch will be a candidate. He is seen by many blacks much as Jackson was viewed by Jews in the past year. This campaign may make 1984 and its tensions between blacks and Jews seem calm by comparison.

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### BENJAMIN AKZIN, Z'L

The Fellows, Overseers, Associates, and staff of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs mourn the passing of Professor Benjamin Akzin, JCPA Overseer and dean of Israel's political scientists. He passed away on 25 Nissan (April 16), at the age of 80. Professor Akzin was secretary to Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky in the last years of the Revisionist leader's life, and was Israel's first professional political scientist, a figure of great standing in Israeli society. In his last years he was actively involved in several facets of the JCPA program. We will miss his presence and his wise counsel.