There is an old joke about three men asked to write an essay about the elephant. The Englishman writes on “The Elephant and the British Empire,” the Frenchman on “The Elephant and Love-Making,” and the Jew on “The Elephant and the Jewish Question.” Perhaps this is understandable since, though we all live under one sky, we all have different historical horizons. Many have tried formulating definitions of history. For Croce, all history was “contemporary history.”¹ R. G. Collingwood argued that all history was “a history of thought,” while Napoleon cynically observed that history was “a fable agreed upon.”² Valéry insisted that history “is the most dangerous product ever concocted by the chemistry of the intellect.”³ One distinguished English historian reputedly said that history was just “one damn thing after another.” Without diving too deeply into the dark pool of historiography, many historians would agree with Namier that history’s subject matter is primarily human affairs and that these human affairs are “concrete events fixed in time and space . . . not things universal and generalized.”⁴ Each man may be his own historian, however. Human events which influence people effectively often revolve around simple events reflecting human nature and behavior. For example, in an Israeli kibbutz there was a donkey named

¹ Benedetto Croce, The Theory and History of Historiography (London, 1921), part I.
Shlomo. One day he disappeared, and all the children were upset. As they were bemoaning their loss, in walked an old man, somewhat senile and the object of ridicule in the kibbutz; he was dragging Shlomo, the donkey, behind him. "How is it," they asked him, "that you of all people have found the donkey?" The old man scratched his bald pate, looked at the ceiling, smiled, and said: "It was simple. I just asked myself, 'Shlomo (for that was the old man's name as well), if you were Shlomo, the donkey, where would you go off to?' So I went there and found him and brought him back." This is only a small piece of history, but a large display of empathy.

One of the recent ironies of history is that, despite World War II, a long war fought against racial tyranny and for other important reasons, man's empathy for his fellow man in post-war America has rapidly disappeared into the storm clouds of racial violence and alienation. After a long history of racial exploitation and oppression, America is forced to admit that our society is afflicted by a chronic and agonizing malady—white racism. Race prejudice has decisively shaped our history; it now threatens to affect our future. Yet many Americans have met the challenge of the twentieth century by refusing to emerge from the nineteenth century! Many years ago H. G. Wells warned: "I am convinced myself that there is no more evil thing in this present world than race prejudice, none at all! I write deliberately—it is the worst single thing in life now. It justifies and holds together more baseness, cruelty and abomination than any sort of error in the world." *

A CARICATURE NO LONGER

Skeptical, disillusioned, and frustrated, many Americans seem to be caught in a dark and tangled jungle of racism, and the American Dream has lost some of its luster. The struggle for dignity, for what Martin Luther King, Jr. called "somebodiness," is an integral part

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* Quoted in McWilliams, title page.
of the American Dream, but human dignity could not reach full fruition with "marginal men"—what Ellison termed "invisible men," when writing of American Blacks. The dream is bound to fade. Many early writers in American history were aware of the contradiction between American democracy and the subterranean currents of racism. In the early 1830's Tocqueville wrote: "I do not believe that the white and black races will ever live in any country upon an equal footing. But I believe the difficulty to be still greater in the United States than elsewhere." This is the difficulty we are still wrestling with today.

In the nineteenth century, a diversionary issue on the American scene was the omnipresent scapegoat category, its principal characters shifting with the changing events. The alien, the foreigners, the Jew, the Negro, the "yellow peril"—each served his purpose as the principal target. After World War II, the civil rights movement opened the floodgates to legislation which had long been postponed. Coupled with this, "other social and economic changes were corroding the image of the second-class citizen." The day of the "hymn-singing, submissive, all-enduring, religious, affront-swallowing, yes-massa-ing Negroes" was gone. No longer does the Black sing: "Happy little nigs are we; just as gay as gay can be"; no longer is one urged to stop in and "listen to the song and dance of Happy Nigger Joe." With the rise of Black Power and the coming of the Super-Industrial Revolution, the American Black has embarked upon a serious search for identity and a place in the American sun.

Now that the smoke has temporarily subsided from the riot-torn cities, one is forced to admit that any encounter with reality shows


* Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York, 1945), I, 373.


that the racial imbalance conflict still rages. In his excellent analysis, Alan H. Schechter wrote:

The contemporary European caricature of the United States as a country in which self-satisfied white people live prosperously in suburban san-
ctuaries which surround our large cities or in high-rent urban residential
areas and black citizens live in decaying central city slums will be a cari-
cature no longer.12

Today even safety and security do not seem to suffice where mat-
ters of personal worthiness and identity are the real issues. Charles
A. Reich, in The Greening of America, reflected on what is perhaps
the inordinate importance given credentials in our society: “In a
world where men are recognized only by their credentials, to lose
credentials is to cease being a human being.” 13 The struggle of the
American Black to acquire these credentials is really his struggle for
freedom.

America today presents a model of medieval impregnability to-
wards those social and political changes which would ultimately re-
sult in full citizenship for many of our minority groups, especially
for the Black Man in American society.14 In the twentieth century,
however, one group which made a gallant effort to melt the “ice of
indifference” of American society toward the American Black was
the white Jewish liberal group.15 It is not my purpose here to reiterate
the long record of desperate struggle, or the splendid expectations
which surrounded the high hopes and efforts of the many American
Jews who, both singly and in concert with one another, fought dis-

Nathan S. Caplan and Jeffrey M. Paige, “A Study of Ghetto Rioters,” Scientific
American, August, 1968, pp. 15–21.


14 Abram Kardiner and Lionel Oresey, The Mark of Oppression (New York, 1969),
pp. 63–64. See also John M. Blum, The Promise of America (Baltimore, 1965), p.
124; Lerone Bennett, Jr., Confrontation in Black and White (Baltimore, 1965), p.
115.

15 Philip S. Foner, ed., “Colored and Jewish Workers: A Document by A. Philip
Randolph and Chandler Owen,” Jewish Currents, February, 1967, p. 4; Mrs. Martin
Luther King, Jr., “Jews and Negroes: Unity from Collision,” Jewish Currents, Janu-
discrimination in America.\textsuperscript{16} From a superficial vantage point, it might seem only natural that the Jews, people on whom the Diaspora had imposed severe discrimination, would make a long and determined effort to aid and support the Black fight for freedom and equality. And yet one of the ironies of history has been that the downtrodden peoples of the land often fail to form firm and permanent alliances in the political sphere to improve their mutual fortunes. An excellent example of this is to be found in the American South during the latter part of the nineteenth century when the Blacks and the poor Whites failed to form an effective lasting alliance in a bona-fide effort to consolidate their political power.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Sell 'Em To De Jew}

In recent years, despite common concerns, many points of tension have developed between American Jews and American Blacks. High expectations of behavior were often followed by deep resentment on both sides when behavioral performance failed to square with imagined ideals. In their desperate struggle for freedom, some Blacks expressed hostility toward white society by striking out at the American Jew who, quite sensitive to such hostility, often misunderstood the large diversity of Black life in America. Some writers would argue that Black-Jewish relations have never been very strong since the late nineteenth century. Cruse mistakenly concluded that Jews and WASPs collaborated against the Blacks on the cultural front and that “the Negro's best friend is the Jew” is one of history's greatest myths.\textsuperscript{18} Baldwin uses a form of scapegoating when he writes:


The Negro facing a Jew, hates, at bottom, not his Jewishness but the color of his skin. It is not the Jewish tradition by which he has been betrayed but the tradition of his native land. But just as a society must have a scapegoat, so hatred must have a symbol. Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew.\(^1\)

In recent American history, the Jew has been no stranger to the Black ghetto, but many American Jews know the Blacks in only a few relationships: landlord and tenant; seller and buyer; master and servant. Unfortunately, these are not relationships likely to make for mutual understanding and appreciation. Langston Hughes, in his classic poem “Hard Luck,” has his downtrodden Black Man sing:

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When hard luck overtakes you
Nothin' for you to do.
When hard luck overtakes you
Nothin' for you to do
Gather up yo' fine clothes
An sell 'em to de Jew.
Jew takes yo' fine clothes,
Gives you a dollar an' a half.
Jew takes yo' fine clothes,
Gives you a dollar an' a half.
Go to de bootleg's,
Git some gin to make you laugh.
If I was a mule I'd
Git me a waggon to haul.\(^2\)
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This poem alluded to the Jewish pawn shop and the common practice of Jewish money-lending in the Black ghetto.

A. F. Miller claimed that there never was a huge bubble of friendship between the American Jew and the American Black, that these two cultures were always in sharp conflict. He recalled vividly the so-called “slave market” which existed in The Bronx in the 1930's when Jewish housewives hired Black women for housework at the

\(^1\) James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston, 1957), pp. 71–72. See also Lawrence A. Kogan, “The Jewish Conception of Negroes in the North: An Historical Approach,” *Phylon*, Winter, 1967, pp. 376–85, in which he concludes that being part of a minority group does not preclude prejudice toward another minority group; that minority groups are not natural allies in countering prejudice.

pittance of twenty-five cents per hour; there was a continual hostility brought about by "allegations of exploitation by Jewish landlords and businessmen." 21 In his analysis, Miller insisted that the Jews, a minority in the United States, quickly embraced the political and racial attitudes of the dominant white majority.22

What we have here is a kind of "high noon" showdown. We cannot be astigmatic neutralists who take no notice of the historical facts—and these are indeed ugly facts—that in recent years anti-Semitic expressions among Blacks, whether mild or overtly hostile, have intensified. As far back as the Reconstruction period in the South one can obtain vague clues to some form of anti-Semitism. Note, for example, E. M. Coulter's description (written with overtones of resentment and tinged with anti-Semitism) of Jews in the South:

The end of the war saw an invasion of Jews to reap a harvest in trade; the ante-bellum Jewish peddlers with their packs on their backs or in rumbling hacks now settled down and opened stores. Sticking to their business and treating the freedman as an important businessman, not eschewing to call him "Mister," they secured, "with their tumble-down shanties and Cheap Jack goods," a great amount of the Negro's trade.23

In the years following 1934, the Harlem papers printed articles which contained anti-Jewish overtones. Prior to this period, Garvey's Back-to-Africa Movement had carried Black anti-Semitic sentiments into the center of the activist stage.24 Although Garvey's anti-Semitic


sentiments were not overt at the beginning of his movement, as time went by he seemed to become more and more embroiled in a constant battle with American Jews. When Garvey came to trial for mail fraud in 1923, one observer, J. A. Rogers, in the Writers Program, stated that:

[Marcus] Garvey apparently aggravated his case by continual and unfavorable references to Jews. He had bought his rotten ships from Jews and when he mentioned the names of any of these men he always [during the trial] suffixed it with "the Jew." Both the judge and prosecutor at the trial were Jewish, as were at least two jury members. When the verdict of guilty was brought in, Garvey shouted, "the dirty Jews." 25

In his excellent and informative analysis of Black anti-Semitism in New York in the 1930's, Muraskin describes the rise to power of Sufi Abdul Hamid (the pseudonym of Bishop Conshakin) in New York's Harlem at that time. He argued strongly that Sufi "employed anti-Semitism as a key technique for gaining support." 26

In the unique documentation of the indignities suffered by American Blacks entitled The Autobiography of Malcolm X, the reader is surprised to find the Jew presented as a target—the enemy, so to speak:

I don't care what a Jew is professionally, doctor, merchant, housewife, student or whatever—first he, or she, thinks Jew ... in every black ghetto, Jews own the major businesses. Every night the owners of those businesses go home with that black community's money, which helps the ghetto to stay poor. 27

In all fairness to Malcolm X, it should be pointed out that, although he seems to make the Jew out to be the enemy of the Black man, he


26 Muraskin, p. 7. See also Amsterdam News, Sept. 29, 1934, p. 1.

did argue that he was not anti-Semitic, but anti-exploitative. This theme of exploitation by the Jew in the ghetto runs strong in much of the literature. We find it in A. H. Spear's *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920*:

In Chicago, there was no omnipresent white man demanding obeisance. "The man," to be sure, was still there—the boss on the job, the cop on the beat, the Jew that ran the clothing store, but he was further removed from the intimacies of everyday life.

Ethnic errors are sometimes humorous; they would be almost ridiculous if they did not have such an ironic overtone. During the Great Depression of the 1930's, when America was caught in the vise of poverty, with the Black ghettos in particular suffering great physical and moral deprivation, the Jew in the ghetto with his high visibility as a white man sometimes became a symbol of oppression. Muraskin observed: "In the black's [sic] eye not only the Jewish store but the omnipresent Jewish pawnshop, or 'Shylock's Castle,' became the symbol and cause of his desperate plight." Ironically, many of the merchants in Harlem at that time were in reality Greeks, but as Claude McKay pointed out, the Blacks identified them as Jews because they looked alike.

Louis E. Lomax insisted in 1962 that anti-Semitism was on the rise among Blacks in the ghetto. This, he contended, was due to more than the presence of Jews as merchants and moneylenders and collectors in the Black areas. To provide a foundation for his argument, Lomax took as his focal point the study of Black integration into suburbia conducted by the University of Chicago in 1959. He concluded:

Jews are white people, but orthodox, or conformist, Jews are more than just white; they are a people with a tradition which, as both a theoretical and practical matter, offends Negroes. . . . Of all the ethnic suburban ghettos, the study concluded, the Jewish communities were the most adamant about keeping Negroes out.

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30 Muraskin, p. 8.

Martin Luther King
Humanitarian
Jewishness, not prejudice, is the explanation for this. Jews in these gilt-edge ghettos opposed integration not because they hated or discriminated against Negroes; but rather they were seeking to realize that element in their tradition which calls for togetherness.\textsuperscript{32}

It is possible that any semblance of anti-Semitism which existed in the Black community in the past may have centered not on misconceptions about the attitudes that Jews had toward Negroes, but on more traditional animosities.\textsuperscript{33} Over and above this, many of the recent studies from the anthropological and sociological point of view of attitudes and stereotypes among Blacks have shown that they hold the same prejudices and stereotypes towards diverse ethnic groups as whites do.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Both Sides of the Looking Glass}

At this juncture, a "caveat" must be entered so that we do not get caught in our own semantic booby-trap. If we grant that the Black community is a kaleidoscopic community, then it cannot be argued that all American Blacks are anti-Semitic simply because anti-Semitic statements are often uttered publicly by some Black leaders. On the other hand, since each dogma has its day, neither can we ignore the overt statements made by these leaders—even granting that it is very difficult to measure the impact of their utterances on the Black community. The magazine \textit{Liberator}, for example, carried a series of articles entitled "Semitism in the Black Ghetto," by Eddie Ellis. These articles expressed the author's hostility toward a white society while


at the same time condemning the Jewish liberal element in the community. The author wrote:

On the one hand, the liberal Jewish community advocates the equality of all men. But, on the other hand, the same Jewish community is often responsible for the shoddy goods found in most Black ghettos since they own the stores. They are responsible for the dilapidated buildings, the rats and the roaches, since they are the landlords. Still they insist "we are your friends." 35

Many segments of the Jewish community rose like an indignant soufflé to counter these charges. Benjamin R. Epstein, of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, stated critically: "Jews have begun to realize that overt and strong efforts to correct 300 years of injustice to Blacks are being done at a cost to the Jews." 36 In trying to assay the arguments from both sides, another word of caution is in order, for historians have too often found themselves in the position of Minerva's owl which, as Hegel put it, "spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk"; they have put forward comprehensive explanations of a social trend just at the moment when it ceased to exist or was reversed by unforeseen historical mutations.37

Such, unfortunately, is not the case in this instance. Certain recent events, turbulent and anarchic, have conspired to produce a torrent of anti-Jewish expression which can no longer be disguised as the commonplace hostility of one race against another. A flood of Jewish hysteria in the press proves once again that in the heat of battle men often forget where their mutual interests lie. In retrospect, we are like Alice in Wonderland—in both sides of the looking glass. We need to examine these events critically, not to condemn or to judge, but to ask why, without orchestrating platitudes, while recognizing that in history often great catastrophes from little errors grow. What we are attempting to examine here is the "falling out of allies,"


the dissolution of a former alliance. My pose is that of a historian, but my observations could be entitled "some conjectures of a guilty bystander." While looking at this series of recent events darkly through a Kafkaesque lens which transforms them into a surrealistic nightmare, historians of contemporary America would find it difficult, indeed almost impossible, to deny that a serious change has taken place in the relationships between the American Jew and the American Black. And yet, in examining this phase of history, any historian searching for the lightning interplay of meaning wishes that he could put Leopold von Ranke's dubious dictum into practice, especially in historic situations where the bizarre becomes commonplace.

Tensions between Blacks and Jews have simmered under the surface for years. Breaking into the open with the battle over the decentralization project in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district, they reached a peak during the school strike of September–November, 1968, in New York City. I do not propose to delve into the intricacies of the New York City school strike, but to examine the curious circumstances resulting from the conflict. Unfortunately, an enormous amount of race prejudice—both Black and White—surfaced in and about the school controversy. Prior to this, in 1967, the dismal prophecy of one writer presaged what was later to become a bitter truth:

Of the thirty school districts of New York City, eighteen, or 60 per cent, are headed by Jewish assistant superintendents . . . this monopoly of top jobs in the educational system has produced tensions between Jews and negroes [sic]. . . . In the future, as black people press harder against some of the tender political spots now filled by Jews, tensions between the two groups will in all probability increase.40


The confrontation on the picket lines between striking White teachers and the Black community provided an opportunity for extremists on all sides to indulge in hostile and irresponsible statements which left a legacy of unrest and great distrust. Under the headline banner of "Anti-Semitism in N. Y. C. Schools," the Preliminary Report of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith critically examined the key question: To what extent are the Blacks involved anti-Semitic? The Report defined five major circumstances in which anti-Semitism overtly appeared in the school dispute. Under the area of "Mental Genocide," the Report stated:

The Anti-Semitism in New York City Schools has been instigated in part by the development of a black separatist “philosophy” that charges both “mental genocide” of ghetto children by Jewish teachers and supervisory personnel and the “wilful exclusion” of black teachers and principals by a “Jewish Establishment.”

The Report cites certain blatant examples of anti-Semitism. These incidents occurred when the United Federation of Teachers stayed out of the New York City schools for thirty-six days in three separate city-wide walkouts. What began as a struggle for power ended in an exchange of racial epithets, and ethnic jingoism ran rampant on both sides.

The Report quoted an editorial entitled “Needed: A Responsible Jewish Voice,” from the African American Teachers Forum, the official organ of the African-American Teachers Association. In part, the editorial asserted:

And the Jew, our great liberal friend of yesterday, whose cries of anguish still resound from the steppes of Russia to the tennis courts of Forest Hills, is now our exploiter! He keeps our men and women from becoming teachers and principals and he keeps our children ignorant.

According to the Report, the Long Island Press reported that Robert Carson, at a rally in Jamaica at Junior High School 142, had “denounced the ‘Weinsteins, Goldbergs, boobies’ who teach Negro chil-

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42 Ibid., p. 9.

43 Ibid.
The catalogue of complaints against Black extremists is too long to be given a "blow-by-blow" description here. One event, however, bears critical examination. In late December, 1968, over radio station WBAI-FM, a Negro schoolteacher named Leslie Campbell read a poem "dedicated" to Albert Shanker, the Jewish president of the U. F. T. It had been written, according to Campbell, by a fifteen-year-old girl. In part it read:

Hey, Jew boy, with that yarmulke on your head
You pale-faced Jew boy—I wish you were dead;
I can see you Jew boy—no you can't hide,
I got a scoop on you—yeh, you gonna die.45

As a result of this the teachers' union filed a formal protest with the Federal Communications Commission.

Tempers also flared when the catalogue for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's new photographic exhibit, "Harlem on My Mind," contained an introduction written by a sixteen-year-old Black girl, Candice Van Ellison, while a student at Theodore Roosevelt High School in The Bronx; it read in part: "Behind every hurdle that the Afro-American has yet to jump stands the Jew who has already cleared it. Jewish shopkeepers are the only remaining 'survivors' in the expanding black ghettos. The lack of competition allows the already exploited Blacks to be further exploited by Jews."46 The curious thing about this event is that neither Thomas P. F. Hoving, director of the Metropolitan Museum, nor Francis T. P. Plimpton, a Museum trustee, nor New York City's Human Rights Commissioner William Booth, all of whom attended the opening of the Museum exhibit, saw anything unusual about the inflammatory introduction.

GROTESQUERIES

The reaction to these anti-Jewish sentiments in some cases bordered on hysteria. When a "sit-in" occurred at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts—ironically, it was led by a Black Jew
who once attended Boston’s Hebrew College—one Jewish leader suggested that the University “should be made ‘Schwarzenrein’ (‘free of Blacks’) the way Hitler made Germany ‘Judenrein.’”  

Moderate Black leaders say that Jews have overreacted and that their real quarrel is with white American society as a whole. Jewish leaders are not united in their condemnation of Black anti-Semitism. Marten Gopen, of Boston’s New Urban League, vehemently insisted that Jewish leaders have exaggerated anti-Semitism as a means of re-identifying Jewishness. Leonard Fein, of Boston’s Joint Center for Urban Studies, has argued that Jews have become paranoic about anti-Semitism.  

The Jewish concern over Black anti-Semitism had been exacerbated by the news media distortions of the extent of anti-Semitism among Blacks. A flagrant example of this was the David Susskind television program which painted New York City’s Harlem as a community in which hatred of the Jews was rampant. On that television program, a Black American made a sweeping statement about Jews based, he claimed, on his experience with individual Jews:  

I think the majority of white Jews... oppress and exploit black people throughout the nation. ... They sell the bad meat to us in the markets in our ghettos. They’re the lawyers who sell us out when we get in trouble. They’re the ones who get my mother [involved] in time payments. They’re the ones most visible.  

The New York Times astutely observed that “the Jewish community is found confused and troubled over relationships with the Negroes.” The review concluded that there was some Jewish backlash due to the ghetto explosions in which some Jewish merchants suffered; there was high resentment over the anti-Israeli stance of some Black extremists who had accused the Jewish state of “Zionist im-

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perialism” and “oppression” against the Arabs; another source of tension had been “the opposition of many Black separatists” to the leadership role played by Jews in the civil rights movement in recent years. Of late many of the Jewish publications—among them, Commentary, Conservative Judaism, Midstream, Jewish Currents, and American Judaism—have devoted considerable space to Jewish-Black relations. Unfortunately, some of the views have been subjective and unenlightening. A good example of this type of writing is Norman Podhoretz’ view in the December, 1966, Midstream symposium. Prior to this time, Podhoretz had written:

Among Blacks, and especially at the extreme edges of the movement for community control where the likes of Le Roi Jones hold sway, there is overt anti-Semitism of the crassest and crudest kind, and white liberal supporters of this movement—again including a number of Jews—have been extraordinarily reticent in their response to it, and even more extraordinarily reluctant to penalize black anti-Semitism with the loss of sympathy and support.

A more balanced and objective view is to be found in the writings of Morris U. Schappes, editor of Jewish Currents, and in the analysis done by Earl Raab for the American Jewish Committee.

One often encounters the bitter allegation that Black leaders, journalists, and writers have failed to speak out strongly in condemnation of anti-Jewish attitudes within their community. This is neither a fair nor an accurate indictment. To some extent, confusion often reigns in this area, and the voices are not often united. Many Black leaders are rightfully convinced that anti-Semitism is not a representative feeling in the Black community, and most of them have gone on


52 Earl Raab, “The Black Revolution and the Jewish Question,” Commentary, January, 1969, in which he concludes: “The black revolution is spurring the Jewish community—and America—into a renewed understanding of pluralistic politics.”
record in opposition to any action or statement of anti-Semitism. At its fifty-seventh annual convention in Los Angeles, July 5–9, 1966, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People passed the following resolution:

We condemn in the strongest terms every manifestation of anti-Semitism, whether by Negroes or in the population generally. We urge NAACP leaders to promptly disavow and condemn any implied or overt anti-Semitic acts or statements by persons associated with our organization.

A. Philip Randolph, the late Whitney Young, Jr., of the National Urban League, and the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were among the many Black leaders who spoke out against the evil of anti-Semitism, thus giving cognizance to a problem which disturbed many segments of American society. Young said on behalf of the League's fifty-five-member National Board of Trustees: “We cannot emphasize too strongly that all oppressed minorities have a common stake in defending one another from the corrosive effects of bigotry.”

King, while deploring the “immoral practice” of condemning all Blacks and all Jews for the mistakes of the few, assured Jewish leaders in a letter of October 10, 1967, that:

There has never been an instance of articulated anti-Semitism that was not swiftly condemned by virtually all Negro leaders with the support of the overwhelming majority. I have myself directly attacked it within the Negro community, because it is wrong. I will continue to oppose it, because it is immoral and self-destructive.

It does seem rather strange and bizarre that Black leaders should be so concerned about anti-Semitism in their community if the phenom-
enon lacks a semblance of reality. The fact that so many important Black leaders address themselves to this matter reveals some honest anxiety about combatting the prejudicial poison—and is a myth really a myth if many people believe that it is founded in fact? Black writers are not at all hesitant to come to grips with the matter. One writer stridently announced: “There is a recent and frightening upsurge of anti-Semitic pronouncements by Negro militants, who are in the vanguard of the civil rights movement in the United States.”

Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr., while granting that the amount of anti-Semitism among Black people “is much too minor to be elevated to the status of a social or physical danger for Jews,” is willing to pronounce anti-Semitism “immoral—a grotesque weapon for a Negro to use.” She concluded that any anti-Semitic Black was really an “anti-Black person.”

POWERS BLACK AND JEWISH

Thomas Bradley, a fine public servant and Black councilman who fought a gallant fight to unseat the incumbent Mayor Samuel Yorty, of Los Angeles, in May, 1969, sadly commented that anti-Semitism in the Black community is not a pleasant subject. Some people—in both of our communities—would rather ignore it or deny its significance. The somber topic of anti-Semitism in the Black community is not an isolated issue. It is part of the larger problem of racism for a democratic society.

Although Bradley had the endorsement of the Los Angeles Times, he lost the election to the reactionary Yorty. Jews in Los Angeles, the second-largest Jewish community in the United States, split their vote between the city’s so-called “law-and-order” mayor, Sam (often


called "Saigon Sam," because of his many foreign junkets) Yorty, and his liberal Black opponent, Thomas Bradley. Warren Hollier, one of Bradley's lieutenants, complained: "We were quite shocked. Jewish community leaders were assuring us that everything was all right when it really wasn't. I don't think leaders in the Jewish community who were for Bradley really understood their own people." 60

A careful search of the records in regard to this mayoralty election in the "City of the Angels" reveals no overt hostility on the part of the voters in the Jewish community toward Thomas Bradley, the liberal Black candidate. 61 It was simply a classic example of political mudslinging on the part of Sam Yorty. Writing in an acrimonious tone, one writer said that Yorty "played on every possible fear, Reds and Blacks, crime in the streets and corruption in high places, the international Jewish conspiracy, and the international student conspiracy." 62 Centuries ago the Black Greek Aesop warned his countrymen to beware lest they lose the substance by grasping at the shadows. In this battle between myth and reality, we emerge from the twilight zone into the harsh light of reality with the knowledge that we cannot accurately measure in any significant way whether anti-Semitism has become a permanent part of the jargon of the Black Power advocates. It may be that what appears as a classic case of anti-Semitism among Blacks is really "the normal rough-house of good old American ethnic politics tied to the consciousness of Black Power." 63

In the Black community in general, it is safe to say, what little evidence there is indicates that Blacks are less anti-Semitic than whites. This is not an unexpected finding in the light of the fact that Blacks are fellow victims of discrimination.

Gary T. Marx's 1967 study, Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community, was directed specifically at the atti-


63 Leo, p. 619.
tudes of American Blacks toward Jews. Marx concluded that 70 percent of the Blacks saw Jewish landlords as better than white landlords, 34 percent felt that Jewish employers were better than other whites as compared to 19 percent who called them worse. More than 80 percent said that they had never been treated unfairly by Jewish merchants. As for the generally held concept that Blacks have a special dislike for Jews, Marx's study shows this opinion to be completely erroneous.64

A similar poll, conducted in late 1967 for the American Jewish Committee in New York's ghettos, confirmed many of these findings.65 The questionnaire addressed to Jewish community relations agencies by the National Community Relations Advisory Council revealed that nineteen cities which had experienced riots in the past three years reported that there had been no overt manifestations of anti-Semitism during any of the riots. The Newsweek poll, "Report from Black America," concluded on June 30, 1969, that the Jews were rated favorably by the Blacks by 2 to 1.

In sharp contrast to this optimistic note, however, was a survey made in 1967 and published in 1969. More sophisticated methods of investigating educational and age differences suggested that, in the Black community, anti-Semitic beliefs were held more by youthful Blacks than by the older members of the community, whereas in the white communities, in general, the young tended to be less anti-Semitic than the older members.66 This discouraging and frustrating revelation has ominous overtones for the future.

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64 Gary T. Marx, *Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community* (New York, 1967): despite the title, the research goes beyond Black attitudes and deals with anti-Semitism in general. This book, the third volume in the "Patterns of American Prejudice" series, is part of the University of California Five-Year Study of Anti-Semitism in the United States, sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.


Perhaps what is disturbing is not the level or the amount of anti-Semitic feeling in the ghetto, but the dramatic increase in the overt expressions of anti-Semitism among some of the militant Black leaders. It needs to be kept in mind that any stream of poisonous prejudice, no matter how small, needs to be contained. Many of the observers insist that what America has witnessed in the past forty years is legitimate group self-interests in conflict. It would then follow logically that, depending upon how one interprets the causes, one would then be able to measure roughly the extent of the threat of anti-Semitism. This is the contention of Edgar Litt:

Sporadic anti-Semitism among Negroes . . . and the economic presence of Jewish shopkeepers in Negro neighborhoods are only minor aspects of the problem. The core problem is that what is looked upon as legitimate militancy by some Negroes is seen as intolerance, nihilism, and extremism among some legatees of the Jewish cultural tradition which has emphasized civil peace and political negotiation. Questions of power relations between ethnic groups have never been solely quantitative matters.67

A Blind Alley, A Trap

Perhaps, like the essay on the elephant, each faction views the issue of anti-Semitism differently. Since we have already agreed that it would be impossible to define the exact extent of the spread of anti-Semitism among Blacks in recent years, it would follow, placing the controversy in perspective, that the term “Black anti-Semitism” cannot be considered historically valid. Careful and critical research has confirmed several facts. For example, we know now that Black hostility toward Jewish merchants, landlords, and employers was not the “concoction of black power ideologues of the past few years.” 68 Also,


events of recent years have revealed that Black hostility toward American Jews does not and did not stem from the traditional type of anti-Semitism, and that the hoary stereotypes of the Jew as a Shylock or even as a Christ-killer were given less cognizance among Black Christians than among white Christians. The fact does remain, however, that a most sensitive Jewish community took aggressive action toward those who overtly reflected any form of anti-Semitism in the Black community regardless of the basic reason for the irrational outburst. John Henrik Clarke once described this ugly human condition as "the myth of Black anti-Semitism." It is my basic thesis, however, that although Black anti-Semitism in general may be a myth, the huge mountain of voluminous evidence confirms that anti-Semitism among Blacks is an ugly historical fact that cannot be denied. It is a historical reality which can be confirmed by indicators such as the speeches of militant Black leaders and the turbulent meaning of many events previously described in this paper. It is difficult to point the historical finger at those events which led to the deterioration of Black-Jewish relations. During the late nineteenth century, while the American Blacks suffered from the lack of proper legal protections, the ravages of Judge Lynch, and the indifference of Presidential concern for their welfare, the Jewish community was preoccupied with European events which involved Jews—the Dreyfus Affair, the Russian pogroms. While petitioning the United States government to take action, the Jews seemed indifferent to the suffering or welfare of the American Blacks. This may have been the turning point in Black-Jewish relations. The Black press was quick to point out the lack of Jewish concern.

From 1900 to 1970, Blacks viewed American Jews not simply as a segment of the white American majority, but as a separate, discrete group of people. Perhaps the key may be found in Marden's thesis in which he has argued that, "as some minorities improve their position, they tend to act toward minorities still below them in rank such


Melvin Steinfield, Our Racist Presidents: From Washington to Nixon (San Ramon, California, 1972), Chapter Six. For a fictional account of the confrontation of the Jew and the Black, see Bernard Malamud, The Tenants (New York, 1971).
as dominants have acted toward them.” At any rate, there is little doubt that the recent flurry of surveys and lofty rhetorical statements by both Black and Jewish community leaders in America—intended to testify to the absence of great problems or differences between these two groups—by implication confirms the historical fact that there is a condition of alienation between Black and Jewish communities. The rapid process of urbanization in the twentieth century has brought Jews and Blacks into close physical proximity to one another. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the American Jew could afford the luxury of political commitment without any personal involvement, but the rise of Black Power forces the Jew to come face-to-face with Black aspirations—hence the challenge and the frustrating friction.

In conclusion, surely we all agree that racism of any sort, whether it arises from the scarred streets of the ghetto or the tree-lined parks of the suburbs, is a social sickness to be combatted by all men of good will. The myth of Black anti-Semitism should be buried in the graveyard along with other obsolete shibboleths. At the same time, anti-Semitism from any quarter, which grows in part out of the search for the classical “scapegoat” and becomes malignant so that all soon become victims, should be recognized as a divisive tactic to prevent Americans from uniting against a common foe. This important idea was well expressed by Schappes in the conference on “Negro-Jewish Relations in the United States,” convened May 3, 1964, by the Conference on Jewish Social Studies. At this Conference, Schappes wisely observed:

... more systematic education against anti-Semitism among Negro people is necessary for the success of the Negro people’s [sic] movement for equality. Just as we Jews have to combat attitudes of white supremacy among Jews in the interest of the Jewish people, in the interest of our democracy and the advance of social progress in our country, so it seems to me that even angry Negro leaders (and there is no Negro leader who is not justifiably angry) need to help the Negro people understand that anti-Semitism is a blind alley, a trap for the Negro people. No people has


ever solved its real problems by anti-Semitism for anti-Semitism is a diversion from the main problem. And the Negro people cannot afford to be diverted from the main problem of white supremacy and white privileges into anti-Semitic channels.  

These are very difficult times in Black-Jewish relations; it would be misleading to view this pressing problem in Jewish-Black relations only in terms of one issue. After a careful historical review of the multi-complex issues which seem to give rise to Black anti-Semitism, one must surely conclude that with the recent rise of the Black consciousness American Blacks strongly desire to direct their own movement toward freedom, and that some confusion does exist between the Jews and the Blacks about the methods for achieving this goal. In this conflict, some irresponsible charges have been made, which have damaged the historical coalition of the Jews and the Blacks. As both groups struggle for an equal share of the opportunity which America offers, they should see themselves not as antagonists, but as allies in a humanitarian struggle.

The logic of this social reality cannot escape the student of American history. Perhaps we can all hope for that bright day when we know that a minority group has "arrived" only when it has the right to produce some fools and scoundrels without the entire group paying for it.