

AN UNEASY ALLIANCE: JEWS AND BLACKS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1945-1953

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In October 1974, the Black Panthers' official publication sharply attacked the Jews of both the United States and Israel. In addition to denunciations of Israel as a racist, imperialist state, the Black Panthers raised the old anti-Semitic allegation that American Jewry dominated the economy and government of the United States.¹ Black criticism of the Jews was not confined to radicals and nationalists. Three weeks after the appearance of this article, 50 black and Jewish leaders met in Chicago with the intention of improving relations and resolving conflicts between the two minorities. The conference ended in failure.

Rabbi Irwin Blank of Boston, one of the conferees, told the press that those attending the conference felt that in recent years Jews and blacks have grown more hostile to each other.² In the black community, Jews are often regarded as rent-gouging landlords and exploitative merchants, he said. For their part, Jews often saw blacks as a threat to economic security and a menace to neighborhood stability. And yet, less than three decades earlier, Jewish and black communities in the United States had appeared to have almost identical interests, to be moving towards a coalition that would reshape American society.

It was the Hebrew Bible, a journalist of the *Chicago Defender* asserted in 1946, which had inspired black slaves to resist slavery and to struggle for their freedom.³ Since the end of the Civil War, he continued, the prejudice and intolerance faced by both groups had further strengthened the bonds between them.⁴ In the immediate post-World War II period, the *Defender* repeatedly urged Jews and blacks to unite in the face of the growing reactionary strength threatening both minorities. The *New York Amsterdam News* also appealed to blacks, Jews, and all oppressed minorities in the United States to unite and fight common racist enemies.⁵ At the same time, the newspaper warned its readers of the dangers of black anti-Semitism which could break up such an alliance.⁶

In the years following World War II, Jewish journalists were no less eager than their black counterparts to create an atmosphere of goodwill between the two groups. Typical of these articles was one appearing in the *Chicago Jewish Forum* in the summer of 1947, emphasizing a common history of persecution and oppression,⁷ and calling for an alliance between blacks and Jews as part of the struggle of all minorities in the United States to achieve equal rights.⁸

In the same month that Japan surrendered to the Allies, lawyers for the NAACP and the American Jewish Congress agreed to work together.⁹ This agreement lasted the eight years between 1945 and 1953, crucial years, and was the apogee in American Jewish-black relations.

Between December 1941 and August 1945, hundreds of thousands of black families moved from farms and small towns in the South to large industrial cities in the North. These migrants often settled in formerly Jewish neighborhoods; the mass of American Jewry now came into frequent contact with American blacks. After the outbreak of the war in Korea on June 25, 1950, another wave of blacks swept over the North, drawn once more by the promise of jobs.

In May 1954, shortly before the end of the Korean War, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that segregating white and black students living in the same community was unconstitutional. This decision represented a watershed in black-Jewish relations. Now the American white middle class, including a substantial portion of American Jewry, realized the necessity of personal sacrifice in order to achieve racial integration. In the ensuing civil rights struggle, many Jews would make sacrifices; for two (Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, killed with James Chaney, a black, near Greenville, Mississippi) it meant their lives.

In the eight years between the end of World War II and the armistice in Korea, how did Jews and blacks regard each other? Further, what were common black and Jewish leadership goals in the struggle to abolish American minority discrimination? And, most importantly, were there indications in the postwar years of the conflict that would later erupt between the two groups?

In an attempt to answer these questions, the leading Jewish journals and newspapers of the United States, including those published in Yiddish, and two Afro-American newspapers, the liberal *Chicago Defender* and the more left-leaning *New York Amsterdam News*, were subjected to content analysis.

THE ALLIANCE: AREAS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN JEWS AND BLACKS

Nazi Germany had surrendered unconditionally to the Allies in May 1945, but not before slaughtering almost six million Jews. Fearful of another eruption of violent anti-Semitism, many American Jews looked to others, including blacks, for support in the struggle against racist and reactionary forces in America.

The Afro-American press expressed analogous fears of an antiblack political and social reaction. If a majority of the German people could sanction the extermination of Jews, Slavs, and Gypsies, might not white Americans attempt to solve the "Negro problem" in much the same way, the black press wondered? After all, some reasoned, weren't blacks hated as much in America as the Jews had been in Nazi-controlled Europe?¹⁰ In the immediate post-World War II era, many black workers lost their jobs, placing economic advances made during the war years in jeopardy. Now the Afro-American press urged all minority groups to stand together against the common enemy, a theme repeated by Yiddish and Jewish English-language publications.¹¹

President Truman and his legislative program, the Fair Deal, won the enthusiasm of a large majority of American Jews and blacks, who then supported the liberal, northern wing of the Democratic party and those eastern Republicans voting with the liberal Democrats. While radical movements continued to attract some Jews and

blacks, leading journals rejected the Communist party and Trotskyite-like splinter radical groups.

Both Jewish and black presses rejected the notion that Soviet society was free of racial and ethnic prejudice. Because of its dogmatism and dependence on the Soviet Union for guidance, the American Communist party had betrayed Jews and blacks, wrote Walter White in 1949.¹² Earlier, another journalist had charged that the recent Soviet attack on "rootless cosmopolitans" was, in actuality, an attack on Jews, since 49 of those arrested on that charge were Jewish.¹³ As some Jewish leaders were to do later, the writer equated Soviet policy towards Jews with that of the Nazis.¹⁴

At the same time that the *Defender* was expressing its concern over the fate of Soviet Jewry, the American Jewish press was condemning the mistreatment of blacks in the South and acclaiming every act of racial justice in both North and South. Every major Yiddish and English-language Jewish publication denounced segregation and the oppression of southern blacks, censuring many southern political leaders (like Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi, who made anti-Negro and anti-Semitic statements on the floor of the United States Senate) as racists and reactionaries. Other southern senators and congressmen opposed a national fair employment practices law as well as all civil rights legislation.

Both the Jewish working and middle classes, as well as leaders of the black community, were interested in the enactment of a federal FEPC (Fair Employment Practices Commission) law. Jews and blacks felt that such a law would abrogate the most glaring discriminatory practices, so common during the economic recession following World War II, in the hiring of workers.

For this reason, the Jewish press urged Congress to pass a strong FEPC law and to enact similar legislation on state and local levels. Jewish journals and newspapers pointed out that these fair employment laws would benefit blacks and Mexican-Americans, as well as Jews, expressing as much concern for the welfare of these minorities as they did for Jews themselves. In a similar fashion, the Afro-American press felt that all minorities, particularly Jews and blacks, would benefit from a federal fair employment law.

In the realm of education, blacks and Jews were perceived to have the same goals. The American Jewish press often linked Jews with blacks in the struggle for abolition of the quota system (*numerus clausus*) in northern colleges and universities.¹⁵ The Afro-American press emphasized a common struggle for equal educational opportunities. Three days after the end of World War II, the *New York Amsterdam News* criticized the president of Dartmouth College, Ernest Hopkins, for his defense of the quota system at that school.¹⁶ Although Hopkins asserted that the presence of large numbers of Jews at Dartmouth would arouse anti-Semitic feelings among the general student body, the newspaper declared that the quota system itself stimulated anti-Semitism among Dartmouth students. The reporter, Earl Brown, compared Hopkins' statement with Senator Bilbo's racist speeches in the U.S. Senate, concluding with an appeal to all minorities, but particularly Jews and blacks, to unite in the common struggle for equal educational rights.

The American Jewish press felt that this struggle could not be won by the efforts of private Jewish and black organizations alone; only the influence and pressure of American governmental agencies at all levels—local, state, and federal—would ensure the attainment of this goal. The necessity for governmental action was particularly apparent in the South. Therefore, Jewish writers and journalists sup-

ported steps taken by the federal government to desegregate southern schools and colleges, and strongly condemned the blatant racial segregation of both public and private facilities.

In December 1948, the *Forward*, the leading Yiddish-language newspaper in the United States, criticized racial segregation in Washington, D.C., warning that indignities suffered by nonwhite diplomats there would adversely affect the United States' international position.¹⁷ The following year, *Forward* objected to de facto separation of white and black students in the Chicago area, as well as to de jure segregation in Miami Beach, Florida.¹⁸

Rather than assuming that all blacks were poor and illiterate, the *Chicago Jewish Forum* urged readers to judge each black on the basis of individual merit.¹⁹ Indirectly calling for social acceptance of middle-class blacks in public and semipublic activities and organizations, Jewish sympathy also often extended to the black lower class. Like the Afro-American press, leading Yiddish newspapers strongly disapproved of the rank exploitation of black and Mexican-American farm laborers.²⁰

Nevertheless, the problems of southern black farm workers who lived far from the major centers of Jewish population were not salient to American Jewry, relative to the question of open housing in large northern cities. Indeed, housing in the sprawling cities of the North was as important an issue there as that of schools in the South. The Jewish press felt Jews and blacks to be the principal victims of restrictive housing agreements, and urged the federal government to take action.

Restrictive housing covenants impeded the movement of socially mobile Jews to the affluent neighborhoods and suburbs of American cities. Because they faced greater hostility and generally were in a lower income bracket than American Jews, the majority of blacks were trapped in slums and decaying neighborhoods of northern central-city areas. Low-income Jews, a high percentage of whom spoke Yiddish, were in the same situation as blacks. All around them they sensed the oncoming decay of the inner city. For these reasons, the Yiddish press urged local and national government agencies to quickly build low-income public housing and to retain rent controls established during the Second World War. Racism was the only reason for delaying construction of this much-needed housing in Chicago, the *Forward* alleged in 1950.²¹ Thus, in three important areas—employment, education, and housing—Jews and blacks sought the removal of those discriminatory barriers and restrictions, relegating them to a second-class citizenry.

This action is reflected in many articles about brotherhood appearing in both Jewish and black newspapers during the years 1945-1953. These included editorials praising Brotherhood Week and the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and articles commending individuals, irrespective of religion or color, who met others of different backgrounds on an equal and fraternal social basis. These articles also included numerous accounts of friendly encounters between Jews and blacks. Nevertheless, some areas of dissension and disagreement marred relations. These found expression in newspapers and journals. It is to these relatively early manifestations of disagreement between Jews and blacks that we now turn our attention.

THE UNEASY UNDERSTANDING

Because of their own history of persecution and oppression, many American Jews empathized with the black plight. This was even true of liberal and radical-minded

Jews who, some blacks felt, declared their sympathy too often and too vociferously.²² But some individuals in the black community knew that Jews were the scapegoats of Western Civilization and Europe, where there were almost no non-whites.²³ Furthermore, Afro-American professionals and intellectuals detected American Jewry's fear of a violent anti-Semitism revival, like that in Germany after World War I.

These blacks also noted the great social advances made by American Jews, and the contrast between a closely-knit American Jewish community and the black community, in a state of chaos and complete disorganization by comparison.²⁴ Some Jews also found it difficult to understand why the lower-class black masses did not rise, as they had, to middle-class affluence. In an attempt to explain the problems and struggles of blacks to its readers, the *Forward* published a series of articles in 1946 describing the living conditions that prevailed in Chicago's crowded Negro ghetto and its sociological structure. Although the great majority of blacks were poverty-stricken and oppressed, a small but influential group of middle-class wealthy blacks was also noted.²⁵ The black community, Grayson wrote, was further divided into the "respectable" and the "sinful"—God-fearing church-goers, and those who led shiftless, dissolute lives.²⁶ Despite income and life style differences, Grayson felt the black community to be unified and, with the exception of Jews, the most self-conscious group in the United States. It was white America, Grayson concluded, which must bear much of the blame for low incomes and the accompanying culture of poverty, as well as for other negative conditions prevailing in the black community.

Nevertheless, the *Forward*, as did other Jewish publications, expected a large number of blacks to move from the lower to the middle classes in the near future.²⁷ That most American blacks remained at the bottom of the economic ladder did not disconcert it.²⁸ In an article appearing in 1952, it emphasized social and economic gains made by Afro-Americans since 1945 in both North and South, predicting further gains in the near future.²⁹ Blacks, also, especially the intelligentsia, could not understand why so many Afro-Americans were impoverished. They, too, were impressed by the social mobility of American Jewry. A few felt that Jews had advanced themselves by exploiting blacks. Reflecting this point of view, the Afro-American press implied that many Jewish landlords and businessmen were taking advantage of black communities. In June, 1951, the *Chicago Defender* openly alleged that some Jews were exploiting blacks, and that American Jewry alone was responsible for deteriorating relations between the two groups.³⁰

However, it was New York City where relations suffered most, partially because of its large Jewish and black concentrations. Even before the end of World War II, an article had appeared in the *New York Amsterdam News* critical of business practices of Jewish shopkeepers in Harlem.³¹ Further, the article's author, Dan Gardner, saw Jews as cheating blacks financially, while misleading them politically, in attempts to forge a common political alliance. The former, Gardner wrote, may use glib, idealistic words in pursuing this goal, but cannot conceal basic conflicts between Jewish and black interests.

Gardner felt that blacks were rooted in the very soil of America, while Jews were recent immigrants. If the latter possessed the blacks' native heritage, they would probably "be the strongest force in American life."³² But, alien to American culture, Jews wanted to make common cause with American blacks.³³

In the latter part of 1947, allegations of deceptive business practices led to a

boycott of white (mostly Jewish)-owned stores in Harlem. In keeping with previous calls for black control of the black community, the *New York Amsterdam News* supported the boycott.³⁴ A decision to support the boycott presented serious problems to *Forward* editors, hence they could neither fully approve it nor completely condemn it. On the one hand, many merchants adversely affected by the boycott spoke Yiddish and read the *Forward*. On the other hand, its founder and editors were social democrats and believed in the fundamental principle of social justice. As such, they recognized that some of the boycotters' grievances were just.

Shaya Grayson, assigned to cover the boycott, stressed the underlying social conditions which led to the protest, yet felt that demands made by boycott leaders were extreme.³⁵ Grayson pointed out that while the small businessmen of Harlem paid high property insurance rates, the coverage would not fully indemnify them in the event of a riot. The *New York Amsterdam News* did not sympathize with this point of view.

THE SOUTH

The Afro-American press did not fully understand how difficult and precarious the Jewish position was in the South. Comprising less than half of one percent of the population, a substantial number of southern Jews are merchants dependent on the goodwill of the entire community.³⁶ Prior to the Supreme Court decision of May, 1954 and before black leaders themselves took action against racial segregation, the Jews of the South generally complied with the status quo and kept their opinions concerning this often-emotional issue to themselves.³⁷ To do otherwise might have aroused wrath and evoked latent anti-Semitism in the largely fundamentalist Baptist white South.

Despite efforts to conform to southern customs, Jews were still suspect in the eyes of some whites.³⁸ In 1951, the Grand Dragon of the Association of Carolina Klans declared that the NAACP was dominated by Jews, that Jews were inciting blacks to riot, and that Jews favored miscegenation.³⁹ These opinions were not confined to racist groups or to lower-class whites. In 1948, a prominent member of the North Carolina chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy circulated a letter stating that almost all the communists in the United States were Jews, and that most of the agitators stirring up southern Negroes were of Jewish origin, as were most of the funds used for this purpose.⁴⁰ The Afro-American press, for its part, not only censured southern Jews for their acceptance of racist traditions, but alleged that they were among the most vociferous supporters of racial segregation and the most blatant exploiters of the Negro in the South.⁴¹

While Jews and blacks were debating their relationship in the South, mutual enemies were attacking both minorities. As reported in the *Defender*,⁴² a rash of cross-burnings erupted in Florida during the spring of 1951, and this southern state was flooded with anti-Semitic literature. Bigotry knows no limitations, an editorial in the newspaper concluded. Despite common dangers facing both minorities, some Jews continued to discriminate against Negroes.⁴³

While the Afro-American press expressed displeasure with American Jewry from time to time, a small number of blacks were attracted and converted to Judaism, establishing several Judaizing churches in the South. In New York City, a group of black Jews organized their own synagogue. In approbation of Judaizing black

churches, the *Chicago Jewish Forum* reported that members of the Church of God and Saints of Christ, like members of any kibbutz in modern Israel, held all their Virginia farm property on a communal basis. In doing this, they felt themselves fulfilling economic and social injunctions of the Old Testament.⁴⁴ The members of this church also practiced circumcision, observed Jewish religious holidays, and used the Hebrew calendar. But this church also taught that, originally, Jews had been a Negroid people; contemporary white Jews were thought to be mulattoes whose black Hebrew ancestors had intermarried with white Gentiles. According to the Church of God and Saints of Christ, it was blacks who were the real Jews, direct lineal descendents of the lost ten tribes of Israel.⁴⁵

AFRICA

The Falashas of Ethiopia, on the other hand, were indeed a Jewish group of Negroid racial stock whose origins preceded the birth of Jesus. Despite almost 2,000 years of isolation from the main body of Jewry, they clung to their religion amidst hostile Moslem and Christian populations, arousing the interest and admiration of Jews everywhere.⁴⁶

The Falashas, a colorful and interesting part of world Jewry, were a handful among the Negroid peoples of sub-Sahara Africa. In the years 1945-1953, these peoples struggled for independence and self-determination, a struggle closely watched by the American Jewish press. The English-language Jewish press supported this black African movement and expressed the hope that transition from colonialism to independence would be gradual and peaceful.⁴⁷ The *Morning Journal*, a Yiddish-language newspaper, took notice of the anti-colonial movement in sub-Sahara Africa and regarded it as a just cause, further praising this struggle for political self-determination as one led by an elite group of westernized intellectuals.⁴⁸

The largest Jewish community in sub-Sahara Africa was not the black one of Ethiopia, but a white, largely Ashkenazic population of South Africa. Like coreligionists of the American South, the South African Jews were caught between black and white Gentile populations.

In December 1945, *Di Zukunft*, a Yiddish monthly, expressed its concern over the future of South African Jewry.⁴⁹ The journal pointed out that Jewish immigration to South Africa had been banned and that pro-Nazis had held an open rally in Johannesburg in mid-1945, four months after the collapse of Hitler's government. Fears for the safety of the South African Jewish community were heightened in 1948 when the Nationalist party of Dr. Daniel Malan won control of South Africa's government.⁵⁰

The Malan government, however, quickly assuaged these fears; in contrast to its policy towards the black majority, no economic or political restrictions were placed upon the Jewish community of South Africa.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the majority of the Jewish community continued to support moderate and liberal elements.⁵²

As one would expect, the *Chicago Defender* repeatedly denounced South Africa's oppression of its black population.⁵³ Walter White commented that South Africa's insistence that its racial situation was strictly an internal affair was the same argument offered by southern politicians to justify lynchings of blacks and mistreatment of Jews as American domestic problems. Altogether, the *Defender* did not distinguish between racial policies of South Africa's Nationalist government and those of Hitler's government. When Daniel Malan's Nationalist party won election in June,

1948, the *Defender* feared that the Bantu people of South Africa "may face the same fate [that] . . . Jews of Germany experienced under Hitler" in the years 1933-1945.⁵⁴

ISRAEL

A divergence of opinion developed between Jewish and Afro-American publications over the issues of Zionism and the historical and contemporary relations of blacks with Arab peoples. Here, Jewish and black writers differed in their assessment of the post-World War II international situation.

As a result of the Nazi extermination of approximately three of every five Jews in Europe, American Jewry became the world's largest and wealthiest Jewish community. Only American Jewry possessed the means to organize and finance the resettlement of central and East European Jewry's remnants in Palestine. However, Jews comprised only three percent of the U.S. population. Therefore, Zionist leaders tried to convince all segments of the American public to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as both a practical necessity and an act of humane compassion.

Afro-American newspapers debated this position and, after the state of Israel was proclaimed on May 15, 1948, debated all aspects of Israel's economic, political, and social life. Between the time of Nazi Germany's surrender and the end of the British mandate government of Palestine, the *Chicago Defender* empathized with the plight of homeless European Jews and sympathized with their desire to go to Palestine. In April, 1947, Walter White alleged that the British government and American State Department were obstructing Jewish emigration to Palestine.⁵⁵ This, he wrote, is a matter of concern for every American, and particularly for the Negro, because when one minority is attacked and mistreated, the rights of all minorities are threatened.⁵⁶

Of even greater significance for Jewish-black relations, the Afro-American press compared the plight of Jewish displaced persons in postwar Europe with that of blacks in the American South.⁵⁷ Blacks lynched in the South and Jews recently murdered by the British on Cyprus and in Palestine were all victims of Anglo-American imperialism, commented the *New York Amsterdam News* in August, 1947.⁵⁸ And, on the same day that the Jewish state was proclaimed in Tel Aviv, William E. B. DuBois, the black leader and historian, wrote that the suffering of Jews in Christian Europe is even greater than that which blacks had endured in white America over 300 years.⁵⁹ Now, he concluded, after the mass murder of six million Jews in Europe, there was only one refuge for survivors of the Nazi slaughter—Palestine.⁶⁰

However, not all the opinions expressed in these two Afro-American newspapers were sympathetic. A year after the surrender of Nazi Germany, a journalist in the *New York Amsterdam News* criticized the Zionist demand that more Jews be allowed to settle in Palestine.⁶¹ It is sad, he wrote, that Jews do not have a homeland. In contrast to black and brown peoples of Africa and Asia, who feel rooted in the lands of their birth, Jews still feel unwelcome in many of the countries of Europe. This does not justify current efforts to force Arabs to open "their country [i.e., Palestine] to people who are Europeans first and Jews afterwards."⁶² Jews, Malliet continued, have no more right to Palestine than Indians have to the United States.⁶³ In August, 1950, even the usually pro-Israel *Chicago Defender* published an article questioning

Israel's policy towards Arab refugees and raising doubts as to her ability to survive, surrounded as she was by Arab states.

This article, a book review, described "pathetic conditions" in Arab refugee camps and criticized Israel for her refusal to either repatriate Arab refugees or compensate them for property left behind in the Jewish state.⁶⁴ Ultimately, the reviewer predicted, Arab refugees "will have to be settled in alien desert land." They will form an irrendentist core in the heart of the Middle East and will continue to threaten world peace.⁶⁵ This was tragic, Willie Ethridge concluded, because Israel needed Arab friendship and trade to survive, while Arabs needed Israel's technical skills to compete with industrialized Western nations.

Between 1948 and 1953 the *Defender* moved from a position of total support for the Jewish state to one of serious doubt about its domestic and foreign policies.⁶⁶ No such shift of opinion transpired in the *Defender's* attitude towards the role played by Western powers in Middle East affairs: the *Defender* consistently regarded them as the common enemies of all peoples in the Middle East. A month after the fall of Berlin, John Robert Badger, a journalist who often wrote about Middle East affairs in the *Defender*, reported that Great Britain and France were already preparing to resume their old struggle for power and influence in Syria and Lebanon.⁶⁷ In this struggle, Great Britain had the support of both the United States and the Arab League, which Badger regarded as "an instrument of British policy . . . to defeat the aspirations of both Jewish and Arab peoples in Palestine."⁶⁸ In the same article, Badger also criticized Dr. Judah Magnes, a prominent Zionist leader, for allegedly supporting a plan to link Syria, Transjordan, and parts of Palestine and Lybia in a federal union.⁶⁹ Such a federation, Badger wrote, would undermine the hopes for a free, progressive Jewish homeland in Palestine, as well as erode the equally legitimate, nationalist aspirations of Arabs; only Great Britain would benefit from such an Arab-Jewish state.

Badger's assessment of the aims of American and British Middle East foreign policy was shared by Earl Brown in the *New York Amsterdam News*. In August, 1946, Brown criticized Great Britain's announcement that she could not permit an unlimited number of Jews to enter Palestine on the grounds that this would antagonize the Arabs.⁷⁰ In actuality, Brown asserted, Great Britain, with the support of the United States, sought to control the vast Middle East oil fields. The British government, like wealthy Palestinian Arabs, feared that further Jewish immigration would arouse the Arab masses from their backwardness and lethargy.

More significantly for the relations between Jews and blacks, John Robert Badger of the *Chicago Defender* favorably compared Zionism with the back-to-Africa movement of American blacks. The only difference between the two, he commented, was that the former movement succeeded, whereas the latter did not.⁷¹ Nevertheless, he felt that eradication of the vestiges of fascism and the creation of a truly democratic Europe represented the best solution to the problem of European anti-Semitism.⁷² Similarly, he felt that black Americans should work for progressive social and political changes in the United States, and not plan for emigration to Africa as a solution to their problems. Four months after the establishment of the state of Israel, Walter White urged American blacks to support the beleaguered Jewish state, threatened as it was by Arabs "backed by Great Britain and the oil interests of America."⁷³ If Israel is destroyed by her enemies, White wrote, the power and prestige of the United Nations, founded in order to promote justice for all, would

decline. This, in turn, would adversely affect the Afro-American struggle for political rights in the United States.⁷⁴

These statements do not reflect the attitudes of all Afro-American journalists towards the establishment of the Jewish state in May, 1948; others felt that the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish areas was a serious mistake. In May, 1947, A.M. Wendell Malliet first praised the Zionist movement as similar to the anticolonial movement in sub-Sahara, then criticized its political goal—the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.⁷⁵ If Arabs and Jews cannot coexist in the same country, this journalist wondered, then how could one expect blacks and whites to live together in the United States? Malliet concluded that the creation of nation-states in Africa as well as the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine would lead to the isolation of both black Africans and Palestinian Jews from the rest of mankind.

In support of Malliet's point of view, the *New York Amsterdam News* published several statements by W. A. Mathews, founder and rabbi of a black Jewish congregation in New York City, wherein he called for a binational state in Palestine.⁷⁶ He declared that Palestine "should be the homeland, not only for Ethiopians and Jews of all other lands, but a homeland for all Hebrews and Hebraic peoples."⁷⁷ The Arabs, he said, are a people of Hebraic stock, and therefore Palestine is their homeland too.

In a complete reversal of his earlier position, Walter White later deplored the partition of Palestine, once the Jewish state had been established and then attacked by Arab armies. In 1949, he wrote that the partition of the Holy Land served to further divide Arab and Jewish peoples, and he predicted the partitioning would lead to more conflicts, further draining the Middle East of its limited wealth.⁷⁸

THE THIRD WORLD

The attitudes of American blacks towards the Jewish state were closely linked to their attitudes towards the Third World, whose population is largely nonwhite. In June, 1951, the *Chicago Defender* reported that Israel was a society free of prejudice towards dark-skinned people: there, Jews of European origin did not discriminate against darker Jews from Arab countries.⁷⁹ Moreover, the same article stated that in Ethiopia the Jews (the Falashas) were not oppressed, in contrast to the persecution of Jews elsewhere.⁸⁰ Altogether, the *Defender* suggested, both Jews and Arabs were of Negroid ancestry, and therefore all three peoples—Jews, Arabs, and Negroes—were actually one people from a racial point of view.⁸¹ However, many black radicals and intellectuals did not hold such a cosmopolitan attitude towards the unity of peoples living in sub-Sahara Africa, the Arab states, and Israel.

Because the Jewish state was drawing closer to the West, and because of the antagonism between American Jews and Afro-Americans, an increasing number of radical blacks argued that dark-skinned Arabs were struggling against white, imperialist Zionists.⁸² As early as February, 1946, A.M. Wendell Malliet of the *New York Amsterdam News* espoused this point of view. At that time, he praised King Ibn-Saud of Saudi Arabia, a Negro by American standards, as a champion of the Arabs in the struggle against their enemies: the Zionists, the British, and the Americans.⁸³ This point of view gained popularity among Afro-American radicals and intellectuals.

CONCLUSION

The years 1945 to 1953 are important ones in relations between Jewish and black communities. By the end of World War II, a second wave of immigrants from the South had swelled the number of blacks who lived in large cities of the North, cities which contained the majority of America's Jews. Now the two minorities found themselves in close physical proximity.

The end of the Second World War also raised dangers in the United States of an economic depression, and of a political reaction to liberal advances made in the previous 12 years. In an effort to block these reactionary forces, the majority of America's blacks, Jews, and other minorities supported the liberal wings of the Democratic and Republican parties, and vigorously endorsed Truman's Fair Deal legislative program. Black and Jewish leaders were political allies, successfully cooperating in the common struggle to legally ban discrimination in employment, education, and housing.

But certain areas of friction weakened this alliance between blacks and Jews. These areas of friction stemmed primarily from the rapid social mobility of American Jewry relative to that of blacks, and resentment of the latter towards those Jews who owned businesses and real estate in black neighborhoods.

Throughout their history, Jews have often found themselves in the middle of conflicting social forces; this was the position Jews of the South occupied during the years 1945 to 1953. Many southern Jews had business dealings with blacks, but were distrusted both as merchants and as whites. On the other hand, some among the white southern population felt Jews overly liberal in their attitude towards blacks, felt that Jewish radicals wanted to overturn the entire social structure of the South. The fact that most people in the South were fundamentalist Protestants only made the position of the relatively small Jewish communities in the South more difficult.

The relationship between blacks and Jews was even more complicated in cities of the North. Here blacks often lived in or near Jewish neighborhoods, and much of the real estate and many of the small stores in black residential areas were owned by Jews. Nevertheless, Jewish journals and newspapers often denounced exploitation and oppression of blacks living in both North and South.

Jewish-owned businesses in black neighborhoods were often small ones, with high insurance rates, easily ruined in a riot or by natural catastrophe. A small but significant group of Afro-American intellectuals neither understood how precarious the position of southern Jewry was, nor sympathized with the problems faced by Jewish merchants and landlords in black neighborhoods. Instead, this group of black intellectuals asserted that Jews exploited black masses while, like other northern whites, proclaiming a belief in the equality of all people. These blacks felt, too, that many Jews expressed compassion for blacks in order to dupe them into a political alliance of more benefit to Jews than to blacks. Although only a few Afro-Americans openly expressed this point of view in the years 1945 to 1953, they weakened the alliance between Jews and blacks.

After the Second World War, American higher education underwent a period of expansion, and many Jews of both working and middle classes utilized the opportunity afforded them. Because northern public schools were generally superior to those in the South, Jewish students were often better-prepared for advanced study than were southern black high-school graduates. Indeed, Jewish applicants to black

medical schools in the South (Howard University and Meharry College) often displaced black applicants.⁸⁴ Faced with this situation, Howard University began to limit the number of Jewish students who might enter its medical school.⁸⁵ No doubt, the situation further irritated relations between blacks and Jews.

Unquestionably, some Jews absorbed the racist attitudes so widespread in American society before the emergence of the civil rights movement and before the Supreme Court decisions of 1954 to 1955. On the other hand, many other Jews expressed sympathy with political and economic struggles of black peoples, both in the United States and in sub-Saharan Africa. Although some blacks questioned the sincerity of some Jews, the black community generally recognized that Jews, too, had a history of oppression and persecution. Furthermore, many blacks realized that often the Jews and they shared the same enemies. These factors may have facilitated the conversion of a small number of blacks to the Jewish religion.

Therefore, black hostility to Jews was expressed obliquely in the guise of anti-Zionism and, after May, 1948, in the form of strong criticism of Israel's foreign and domestic policies. Anti-Zionism gave these Afro-Americans an ideological link with Arabs and other peoples and governments of the Third World who opposed the Jewish state. Therefore, black Americans could feel part of the world's colored majority, and attack Jews owning property and businesses in black neighborhoods and whose children were advancing socially at a faster pace than were their own.

At the same time, the anti-Zionist blacks denied that they were anti-Semitic, asserting the reverse to be true—Israel as an expansionist and racist state. The growth and development of this point of view among Afro-American intellectuals was slow and uneven, but served to make the alliance between the Jews and the blacks in the United States during the years 1945 to 1953 an uneasy one.

NOTES

1. *The Black Panther*, October 26, 1974, p. 2.
2. *Chicago Daily News*, November 16, 1974, p. 14.
3. *Chicago Defender*, May 18, 1946, p. 15; May 25, 1946, p. 15. The author of these articles, Earl Conrad, is white.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *New York Amsterdam News*, June 1, 1946, p. 10.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Charles I. Glicksburg, "The Negro and the Jew," *The Chicago Jewish Forum* V (Summer 1947): 229.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Leonora E. Berson, *The Negroes and the Jews* (New York: Random House, 1971) p. 96.
10. *Chicago Defender*, November 6, 1948, p. 7.
11. *Morgen Zhurnal*, *Morning Journal*, December 13, 1945, p. 5 (hereafter, the term *Morning Journal* will be used rather than *Morgen Zhurnal*); Carl Dreher, "Racism and America's World Position: The Potential Democratic Nationalism," *Commentary* 4 (August 1947): 164-69; Charles I. Glicksburg, "The Negro and the Jew," *The Chicago Jewish Forum* 5 (Summer 1946): 229-33; Arthur Zuckerman, "The City College Student Strike and Academic Freedom," *The Reconstructionist*

15 (May 13, 1949): 22-26; Rabbi Sidney J. Jacobs, "Words and Music," *The Sentinel* 166 (May 5, 1949): 32.

12. *Chicago Defender*, December 3, 1949, p. 7. Walter White, who served as executive secretary of the NAACP from 1930 to 1955, was one of the most prominent black journalists in the United States.

13. *Ibid.*, July 16, 1949, p. 7. Willard Townsend, the article's author, pointed out that the Soviets had made this clear by printing in brackets the original Jewish names of the 49 who had adopted Russian surnames.

14. On February 19, 1949, Townsend had declared that the Soviet dictatorship was, in toto, no different from the Nazi one.

15. *Jewish Courier*, June 7, 1946, p. 15; *Jewish Independent*, January 3, 1947, p. 4; *Morning Journal*, April 11, 1950, p. 4; Edward N. Saveth, "Discrimination in the Colleges Dies Hard: Progress Report on an American Sore Spot," *Commentary* 9 (February 1950): 115-21; "Editorials: Are Medical Schools Admitting Enough Students?" *The Reconstructionist* 15 (January 27, 1950): 6-8.

16. *New York Amsterdam News*, August 18, 1945, p. 12-A.

17. *Forward*, December 23, 1948, p. 4.

18. *Ibid.*, November 10, 1949, p. 4; January 22, 1949, p. 4. At the end of 1951, the *Chicago Defender* published a stinging editorial condemning the bombings of both synagogues and black project homes in Miami Beach, Florida. *Chicago Defender*, December 15, 1951, p. 10.

19. Barbara Martin, "My Dark Sister," *Chicago Jewish Forum* 10 (Fall 1951): 33-37.

20. *Forward*, August 21, 1951, p. 4; *Morning Journal*, June 5, 1950, p. 4.

21. *Forward*, April 17, 1950, p. 4.

22. *New York Amsterdam News*, August 17, 1946, p. 8.

23. That all Jewish-owned stores are closed on the High Holidays while all synagogues are open, wrote a journalist of the *Chicago Defender* in 1946, "is a tribute to a people who were being lynched and persecuted way back when Blacks in Africa were kings and emperors." *Chicago Defender*, September 24, 1946, p. 6.

24. *New York Amsterdam News*, October 20, 1945, p. 12. In 1952, the black poet and journalist, Langston Hughes, complained that Jews, Italians, and other whites, but not Negroes, were involved in organized crime in New York City. *Chicago Defender*, August 2, 1952, p. 10.

25. *Forward*, January 3, 1946, p. 4. Shaya Grayson, author of these articles, noted that this group of wealthy blacks, with incomes much larger than those of physicians, dentists, and other black professionals, consisted largely of gangsters, dope pushers, and others involved in illicit activities. Moreover, the former group did not number more than 5,000 or 6,000 among more than 350,000 blacks living in Chicago in 1946. Even the few wealthy blacks were paupers in comparison to upper-class whites.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, May 17, 1951, p. 4; January 8, 1952, p. 4; Edwin R. Ambree, "The ABC's of Democracy," *The Sentinel* 167 (September 22, 1949): 74-75.

28. *Forward* frequently published pictures and articles about middle-class and wealthy blacks. Typical of these articles was one describing the life and work of novelist Frank Yerby. *Forward*, May 17, 1951, p. 4.

29. *Ibid.*, January 8, 1952, p. 4. A similar article appeared in *The Sentinel*, pointing out that, in 1862, less than five percent of the Negro population was literate. By 1949, 90 to 95 percent of the black population was literate, in numbers equalling the total population of Canada. More American blacks were studying in American colleges and universities than were Canadians in their universities. Furthermore, the black death rate had declined by 50 percent in the years 1900-1949. Finally, the writer of this article urged Negroes to remember that Jews too are oppressed in the United States. Edwin R. Embree, "The ABC's of Democracy," *The Sentinel* 167 (September 22, 1949): 75.

30. *Chicago Defender*, June 9, 1951, p. 6.

31. *New York Amsterdam News*, April 21, 1945, p. 14-A.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.* Gardner suggested that blacks act directly on their own behalf, and not link themselves politically with any white ethnic group.

34. However, the *New York Amsterdam News* never mentioned Jews by name in boycott editorials. Furthermore, it censured a group of activists circulating pamphlets calling for the forcible ouster of all Jewish merchants from Harlem. *Ibid.*, October 30, 1948, p. 15.

35. *Forward*, January 29, 1948, p. 4; February 3, 1948, p. 4. Grayson even alleged that communist agitators were stirring up black Harlemites against storeowners.

36. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Paleson, eds., *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 334.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 235; Carl Alpert, "A Jewish Problem in the South," *The Reconstructionist* 12 (March 22, 1946): 11.

38. The article, as cited in the previous footnote, appeared in *The Reconstructionist*, the official publication of Reconstructionist Judaism. Its author reported that some southern white Gentiles felt southern Jews to be quite sympathetic with Negroes, noticing their close economic ties. At the same time, Alpert wrote, blacks distrusted Jewish efforts to forge a common political alliance.

39. Mervin J. Block, "KKK on the Rampage," *The Sentinel* 177 (November 8, 1951): 14.

40. Harry L. Golden, "A Son of the South and Some Daughters: Carolina Epistle with a Happy Ending," *Commentary* 12 (November, 1951): 379-80. The statements in this letter centered around a project to erect a statue in honor of Judah P. Benjamin in Charlotte, North Carolina.

41. *Chicago Defender*, May 4, 1946, p. 15; May 5, 1951, p. 6; June 2, 1951, p. 6; *New York Amsterdam News*, April 28, 1945, p. 10-A.

42. *Chicago Defender*, July 28, 1951, p. 6.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Philip Rieff, "Judaism and Democratic Action," *Chicago Jewish Forum* 9 (Spring, 1951): 169.

45. *Ibid.* Another Judaizing sect, the Church of God, Christian Workers for Fellowship, and a splinter group, The Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, maintained that Jeremiah, Job, Jesus, and Moses' wife were of Negroid racial stock, but did not assert that blacks were superior to whites.

46. *Morning Journal*, September 14, 1951, p. 4; Wolf Leslau, "The Black Jews of Ethiopia: An Expedition to the Falashas," *Commentary* 7 (March 1949): 216-21.

47. Rita Hinden and Barnett Litvinoff, "The Dilemma That Racism Poses for Britain," *Commentary* 12 (August 1951): 151-60; Henry Merrit, "Kenya, Africa," *Chicago Jewish Forum* 11 (Summer, 1953): 236-37. Merrit reported the entire colonial world was in a state of upheaval and turmoil.

48. *Morning Journal*, September 19, 1951, p. 7; April 27, 1952, p. 4.

49. Yohanan Botnitzski, "Jews in South Africa," *Di Zukunft* 10 (December 1945): 765-67.

50. The Nationalists, opposing South African participation in World War II, sympathized with the Nazis and held similar anti-Semitic views. Edgar Bernstein, "The South African Problem," *The Sentinel* 165 (December 30, 1948): 37.

51. In 1948, the 100,000 Jews of South Africa comprised seven percent of its white population. To attack them would divide the white community, and possibly antagonize world opinion. T.C. Robertson, "Racism Comes to Power in South Africa: The Threat of White Nationalism," *Commentary* 6 (November 1948): 429.

52. E. Bernstein, "South African Problem," p. 41.

53. *Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1946, p. 15.

54. *Ibid.*, June 12, 1948, p. 14.

55. *Ibid.*, April 5, 1947, p. 5. Specifically, White charged that Prime Minister Atlee, with the connivance of the American State Department, had parried President Truman's proposal that 100,000 Jewish displaced persons be allowed to enter Palestine when the former suggested an Anglo-American commission be established to look into this matter. This, White felt, was only a delaying tactic. (White's information is based on a book by Bartley C. Crum, former advisor to Wendell Wilkie.)

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, May 17, 1947, p. 14; *New York Amsterdam News*, January 19, 1946, p. 8.

58. *New York Amsterdam News*, August 9, 1947, p. 8.

59. *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1948, p. 15.

60. *Ibid.* Now, DuBois wrote, the Truman administration, like the British government, is retracting its promise to promote the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

61. *New York Amsterdam News*, May 11, 1946, p. 10. The author of this article, A.M. Wendell Malliet, wrote regularly for the *New York Amsterdam News* and advocated what is now referred to as Third World ideology.

62. *Ibid.* Earl Brown, another writer who wrote for the *New York Amsterdam News*, took a less critical attitude towards Jewish immigration to Palestine. On August 31, 1946, he wrote that Great Britain and the United States should have absorbed Europe's homeless Jews. Since these two powers failed to do so, the displaced Jews of Europe should be allowed to settle in Palestine.

63. *Ibid.* In January, 1946, Malliet reported that the Netherlands had earlier offered to resettle 30,000 Jews in Surinam. Malliet expressed his opposition to this offer and suggested that Jewish displaced persons be sent to Australia, Canada, or some other "sparsely settled area." *Ibid.*, January 17, 1948, p. 10.

64. *Chicago Defender*, August 5, 1950, p. 6. Gertrude Martin who wrote the review of Willie Snow Ethridge's *Going to Jerusalem*, noted that Israel thereby ignored a United Nations General Assembly resolution urging the Jewish state to compensate Arab refugees for lost property.

65. *Ibid.* Gertrude Martin wrote that Miss Ethridge went to Palestine with an open mind, "full of admiration for Israel and its accomplishments, but knowing little of the Arabs." There she learned that Palestinian Arabs were an agricultural people "who for centuries have cultivated the same land," only to be evicted from their ancestral homeland and forced to live as refugees under very difficult conditions.

66. In July, 1948, Gertrude Martin praised the industry and devotion by which the Jewish people had modernized Palestine. *Ibid.*, July 31, 1948, p. 15.

67. *Ibid.*, June 23, 1945, p. 15.

68. *Ibid.* In the same article, Badger described the Arab League as an expression of the legitimate, nationalistic aspirations of the Arab people.

69. *Ibid.*, February 2, 1946, p. 15.

70. *New York Amsterdam News*, August 31, 1946, p. 10. In this article, Brown emphatically stated that "the Jewish and Arab people [sic] in Palestine get along together quite well."

71. *Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1945, p. 15.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*, September 4, 1948, p. 15. On the eve of the establishment of the state of Israel, A. Phillip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, urged the black community to support the United Nations' plan for the partition of Palestine. *New York Amsterdam News*, March 6, 1948, p. 10.

74. *Chicago Defender*, September 4, 1948, p. 15.

75. *New York Amsterdam News*, May 10, 1947, p. 12.

76. *Ibid.*, May 10, 1947, p. 1. Rabbi Mathews claimed to be the representative for all black Jews in the United States, who, he said, number about 30,000 persons.

77. In the same article, Rabbi Mathews complained that the black Jews of the United States had "never been invited by any Zionist group to participate in the fight for Palestine."

78. *Chicago Defender*, September 17, 1949, p. 7; September 24, 1949, p. 7.

79. *Ibid.*, June 9, 1951, p. 7.

80. *Ibid.*

81. On March 5, 1949, p. 6, the *Defender* reported that Dr. Ralph Bunche and his staff had finally obtained the consent "of the dark Arabs and fuzzy-haired Jews" to sign an armistice in Palestine.

82. The *Chicago Defender* took a more historically accurate point of view when it published several articles describing the Arabs as both friends and enemies of blacks. On the one hand, they were the foremost dealers in African slaves (still, in 1948), but, on the other hand, were less color-conscious than the Europeans. This was reflected in the honored place held by blacks in the Moslem religion and in Arab culture. *Ibid.*, October 16, 1948, sec. III, p. 2; January 29, 1949, sec. III, p. 2.

83. *New York Amsterdam News*, February 23, 1946, p. 8.

84. Leo Pfeffer, "Columbia's Restricted Clientele," *Jewish Spectator* XII (July 1946): 25. Pfeffer explained that Jewish students applied to Negro schools because Columbia and other northern universities limited the number of Jews who could enroll in their medical schools.

85. *Chicago Defender*, March 5, 1949, p. 6.