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The Unbearable "Whiteness" of Being Jewish

*The Jewish Approach toward Black Power, 1967–1972*

[The Jew] can comprehend the Black struggle but only in the context of his own... it is time that he realize that he, not today's Black, is the invisible man. —M. Jay Rosenberg

I hesitate to say this because I know it will be misunderstood, it doesn't come easily to my tongue—[Jews should have] just a little self-pride, to feel that it is an honor to be among the victims of our century. —Irving Howe

For many American Jews, the late 1960s signaled the end of one era and the beginning of another. On the one hand, the passage of the two most comprehensive civil rights laws by the federal government in 1964 and 1965 represented the high-water mark of the postwar liberal coalition within which American Jews had figured so prominently. On the other hand, the year 1967 brought with it a number of troubling developments. For the second time in thirty years, war in the Middle East in May and June of that year brought Jews throughout the world face-to-face with the possibility of annihilation. The outpouring of support by American Jews for the embattled state of Israel was a measure not only of latent feelings for the Jewish homeland but also of the disturbing perception that if they did not act, the world might once again turn its back on a seemingly overpowered Jewish population. Compounding these forebodings were a number of not completely unconnected domestic developments. New Deal liberalism, a commitment to which had become the backbone of Jewish identity, was breaking up. By the late 1960s the youth-inspired New Left,
which had been born in the early part of the decade with a strong strain of humanism and hope, had become radicalized and often expressed this radicalism in ways that many liberal Jews found disturbing. But perhaps the most unsettling development for American Jews was the advent of Black Power, a movement that both caused and in some ways was caused by the deterioration of relations between Jewish and Black Americans. While there had been signs of discontent in both groups for a number of years, for the first time since World War II the commonality of interests could no longer hide the fact that American Jews and Black Americans were so obviously at cross-purposes. Many Black Americans believed that it was time to consolidate their own power and close ranks against outsiders, eschewing the goal of integration in favor of an appeal for "Black Power."

The Black Power movement, which, among other things, defined Jews outside the racialized movement for social change, more than any other development hastened an end to the "Golden Age" of American Jewry, an age in which American Jews could enjoy the luxury of increasing tolerance while linking their identity to a commitment to progressive causes. But rather than adjust their identities in accordance with a revised racial status, many Jews determinedly refused to consider themselves part of "white" America. Jewish intellectuals and leaders could not extricate themselves from the discourse of liberalism and marginality, which for them had come to define the Jewish past and to embody the Jewish present. But the reality of race in the United States meant that the memory of Jewish suffering could not register on a public conscience now wrestling with its more intense and more protracted engagement with Black Americans.

The Black Power Revolution

In the February 1965 issue of Commentary magazine, the civil rights leader Bayard Rustin recast the civil rights movement from one that emphasized equality before the law to one that emphasized actual social and economic equality. Rustin wrote that "the legal foundation of racism in America [had been] destroyed" and that the civil rights movement "is now concerned not merely with removing the barriers to full opportunity but with achieving the fact of equality." By the mid-1960s, indeed, many Black leaders began to feel that the strategies employed in the early phases of the civil rights revolution were no longer effective. Passive resistance protests and lunch-counter sit-ins were useful for achieving legal integration in the South, it
was true, but they did not produce jobs, education, or health care in inner-city slums.

The problems of the inner city seemed to dominate public discourse as more Black youngsters came of age while living in urban slums and as expectations of advancement continued to grow. From 1940 to 1963 more than three million Black Americans moved from the South to other sections of the country, and by 1966 Black and Puerto Rican children made up a majority of the youngsters in New York City’s public school system. Many younger Blacks began to feel betrayed by the established civil rights leadership, which they accused of being wedded to an antiquated program of “gradualism,” nonviolent demonstrations, and coalition politics. It made no difference to the “New Ghetto Man” that progress against racial discrimination had been made, as any amount of progress would have fallen short of expectations. The urban Black male had developed a new psyche, completely opposed to the docile and submissive Black American of white racist mythology. The new Black male was politically “hip,” tolerant of violence, and loud in proclaiming that he would not passively submit to a life of material deprivation and racial discrimination.

The “New Ghetto Man” was discontent, and he showed it by waging a series of urban riots across the country. On August 11, 1965, the archetypical race riot of the late 1960s took place in the Watts section of Southeast Los Angeles. Watts was demographically representative of other big-city ghettos. Poverty figures showed that four out of ten persons were poor, 38 percent of the families were headed by women, and 47 percent of the children under eighteen lived in broken homes. As on many similar occasions in the late 1960s, the violence began over a routine encounter between police officers and a Black resident, in this case a twenty-one-year-old unemployed Black man who had resisted arrest after being pulled over for driving while intoxicated. Shouting the motto of a local Black disk jockey, “Burn, baby, burn,” a crowd of a thousand Watts residents gathered in response to the arrival of police reinforcements. That night young Watts residents attacked cars driven by whites, white news reporters, and cops. The rioting, looting, and burning lasted almost four days, resulting in thirty-four deaths, 1,072 injuries, 977 buildings damaged or destroyed, and four thousand arrests. On the fourth day the National Guard was called in to quell the violence. In all, there were forty-three racial disorders in 1966 and 164 during the first nine months of 1967. Thirty-three of the 1967 riots were of an intensity that required state police intervention, while eight required the deployment of the National Guard.
The riots in Newark and Detroit were on a scale similar to that of Watts. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, known widely as the Kerner Commission, named for Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois, who chaired it, found that the typical rioter was a teenager or young adult, a lifelong resident of the city in which the riot took place, and, although a high-school dropout, somewhat better educated than his nonrioting Black neighbor. This typical rioter was usually underemployed or employed at menial labor, fiercely proud of his race, extremely hostile to both whites and middle-class Blacks, and, “although informed about politics, highly distrustful of the political system.” There were also clear nationalist overtones to the riots, as rioters showed extreme discipline in attacking mostly symbols of white authority in the ghetto—primarily police and white-owned stores—for the most part sparing stores with markings that indicated they were owned by Blacks.

Militant Black nationalists viewed the riots as guerilla wars being fought to liberate Black colonies. The idea that Black ghettos were actually colonies that served to enrich whites living outside the ghetto had its first prominent spokesman in Malcolm X. Before his assassination in 1964, Malcolm had exclaimed that “in every Black ghetto . . . every night the owners of those businesses go home with that Black community’s money, which helps the ghetto stay poor.” Malcolm also warned that Blacks would take a lesson from the other colonized people of the world. “If white America doesn’t think that the Afro-American, especially the upcoming generation, is capable of adopting the guerrilla tactics now being used by oppressed people elsewhere on earth, she is making a drastic mistake.” By 1967, men like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, successively the leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), picked up Malcolm’s read on the Black ghetto and became the two leading spokesmen for revolutionary nationalism. At a July 19 rally, while Newark was cooling down from its riot, Brown shouted that “Honkies” owned all the stores in the neighborhood. “You got to own some of them stores. I don’t care if you have to burn him down and run him out. The streets are yours. Take ‘em.”

The idea that Black ghettos constitute an internal colony within the United States continues to be hotly debated among scholars. But even if the Black ghetto of the 1960s did not possess the most frequently cited attributes of a “colony,” it did suffer from sufficiently high levels of exploitation and social isolation to lend the idea substantial emotional validity. “Like the peoples of the underdeveloped countries,” Harold Cruse wrote
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in one of the most eloquent statements on the subject, “the Negro suffers . . . the psychological reactions to being ruled over by others not of his kind.”

In the late 1960s, the nationalist interpretation of Black status in the United States came under the rubric of Black Power. Black Power essentially secularized the separatist impulse of Black nationalism, which had previously manifested itself in religious form, and produced an ideological convergence of older nationalist groups and newer militant civil rights groups such as SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Black Power meant different things to different people, but Stokely Carmichael, coiner of the term “Black Power,” attacked the idea of liberal integrationism and alliances with whites on the grounds that it implied that there was nothing worth preserving in the Black community. “Let any ghetto group contemplating coalition be so tightly organized, so strong that . . . it is an ‘indigestible body’ which cannot be absorbed or swallowed up.”

The attempt to consolidate Black political power along racial lines had a new international appeal to Black Americans responding to the rise of the decolonized nations of the Third World. The manipulative Cold War approach of both superpowers to the aspirations of Third World countries and the recent civil rights victories inspired among Black Americans a feeling that they were part of an international majority of oppressed nonwhite people, rather than an isolated minority confined to the United States. The new international identity gave currency to the concept of “Negritude,” which linked Black Americans emotionally, biologically, and politically with other dark-skinned people across the globe and which often resulted in a virulent antiwhite chauvinism.

The development of antiwhite racism among Black Power leaders was bound to impact American Jews more than other whites, if for no other reason than the heavy Jewish involvement in civil rights and Black organizations. One of the most conspicuous instances in which a Black organization with heavy Jewish support and membership turned against Jews was the case of SNCC. Founded in 1960 on the principles of philosophical pacifism, SNCC had attracted widespread Jewish support. But dissatisfaction with what the civil rights movement had achieved caused SNCC to take a major turn by the late 1960s. In 1969, SNCC officially deleted “nonviolent” from its name, and its leader at that time, H. Rap Brown, declared that the organization would no longer be associated with such a concept as a solution to the problems of oppressed people. Before this
declaration, in 1967, SNCC published an attack on Israel in its June/July issue of the SNCC Newsletter that borrowed from the most extreme Arab propaganda. The newsletter charged the Israelis with atrocities and published cartoons showing a hand marked with a Star of David and a dollar sign tightening a rope around the necks of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser and the heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali, implying that the same Jewish forces had both men in their deadly grip. Another cartoon depicted Moshe Dayan, the venerable Israeli general, wearing dollar signs instead of a general’s shoulder insignia. “Zionists lined up Arab victims and shot them in the back in cold blood. This is the Gaza strip,” the text read, referring to a blurred photograph, “not Dachau, Germany.” The text of the newsletter sounded anti-Jewish as well as anti-Zionist themes in a list of indictments the editors called “facts.” It stated that the famous European Jewish family the Rothschilds, “who have long controlled the wealth of many European nations” control much of Africa’s mineral wealth. “Fact 32” of the SNCC newsletter was particularly intriguing. It said that “under the guise of ‘foreign aid’ the Israeli Histadrut (Labor Organization) has gone into African countries, tried to exploit and control their economies, and sabotaged African liberation movements, along with any other African movements or projects opposed by the United States and other Western powers.”16 In attempting to explain that SNCC was not an anti-Semitic organization, Ralph Featherstone, editor of the newsletter, exacerbated the matter, explaining that he was interested in denouncing not all Jews but “only Jewish oppressors”—a term he applied to Israel and “to those Jews in the little Jew shops in the [Black] ghettos.” Featherstone also conceded that he had received some of the information for the SNCC newsletter from Arab sources.17 The Stanford University historian Clayborne Carson, the eminent chronicler of SNCC, has written that the SNCC newsletter was not written as an official policy statement but probably would have been approved by many of SNCC’s leaders. For many Blacks in SNCC, the antiwhite, anti-Israel, and sometimes anti-Semitic stand was, according to Carson, “a test of their willingness to demonstrate SNCC’s break from its civil rights past and a reconfirmation that ties with whites were inconsistent with their desire to express racial aspirations and frustrations without restraint.”18

If one idea was universal among the advocates of Black Power, it was the necessity of a realistic approach to politics. Black Power ideologues believed that the self-interest of American ethnic groups always took precedence over the abstract ideals of equality and brotherly love and that
Blacks had to mobilize as a collective if they were to realize their interests. To be sure, there were prominent Black Powerites, perhaps most appropriately categorized as “alienated revolutionaries,” who believed in the efficacy of a call for a separate Black nation. But Black Power spokespersons generally sought to maintain group identity while enjoying the full benefits of United States citizenship. Black Power asserted that “the dominant thrust of Black ideologies has been the desire for inclusion in the broader American society.”

This was in fact the central theme of Harold Cruse’s landmark volume, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), in which Cruse excoriated the Black intelligentsia not only for embarking on integrationist schemes over the preceding forty years but also for failing to formulate an effective nationalist program designed to address the very specific problems of Black Americans in the United States. According to Cruse, “most of the post-Garvey religio-nationalist creeds have developed an impractical Back-to-Africa, separatist other-worldliness which is romantic escapism; for if the Afro-American does not find his salvation in the United States he will find it nowhere.” In this polemic against the Black left, Cruse criticized the Garveyites for relying on “Back-to-Africa” fantasies, the Communists for allowing Black nationalism to be subordinated to the needs of white Communists, the integrationists for ignoring the realities of group politics, and the ideology of guerrilla warfare, which by the late 1960s had superseded the Marxism of some Black Power activists. For Cruse, “the individual in America has few rights that are not backed up by the political, economic, and social power of one group or another. Hence, the individual Negro has, proportionately, very few rights indeed because his ethnic group . . . has very little political, economic or social power . . . to wield.”

It is ironic, therefore, that a movement born of the nationalist impulse in Black Americans would utilize the tradition of American pluralism to achieve revolutionary gains in the sphere of domestic politics, but that is indeed what happened. On the domestic political front, there were essentially three areas of concern for Black Power: community control of government agencies and programs; race preferences; and political power through government jobs and the redrawing of electoral districts. The demands made in these areas reflected a desire to dissipate the white influence on the affairs of the Black ghetto and led inevitably to confrontation with American Jews.

The irony of a clash between Jews and Black Power advocates should not go unmentioned. Black Power sought to obtain political and economic
privileges through communal solidarity, while Jews, at least to a certain extent, relied less on group solidarity and political power to achieve their place in American life than most other ethnic groups. There can be no doubt that before the emergence of large-scale bureaucracies and professional specialization in the consolidated economy of the 1920s, American Jews relied on ethnic-based institutions to advance themselves, including Jewish trade unions, an extensive network of Jewish communal services, and Jewish loan associations. Nevertheless, after the first world war, Jews enthusiastically utilized education and certification as a major platform by which to join the middle class, and they relied increasingly on the growing use of merit-based criteria to gain admission to higher education and the professions. The increasing use of objective professional and educational criteria in employment saw a massive alteration in the character of the Jewish workforce by the 1920s, which by 1930 and for the remaining decades of the twentieth century would be characterized primarily by white-collar professional employment. By 1935, a survey sponsored by the New York Welfare Council found that only 3 percent of Jewish households contained fathers employed as unskilled laborers. By the late 1920s, the historian Henry Feingold tells us, “it became clear, [Jews] were not the sons of workers nor would they produce sons who were workers.” While white-collar professionals form semiexclusive occupational niches through networks and associations much as blue-collar laborers do, in the case of the professions these exclusionary devices are fueled at least as much by the shared values derived from common occupational and educational experiences as by those deriving from any specific ethnic loyalty. It therefore seems likely that only a small fraction of American Jews owed their middle-class status to anything that could be defined as “Jewish” solidarity. Some critics might argue that Jews advanced into the middle class by utilizing those rights and privileges available to them as “whites” but denied to Blacks, including, in many states, the right to vote, greater residential mobility, and greater access to lending institutions. But even from this perspective, the faster rise of Jews up the socioeconomic ladder compared to other white ethnic groups would have to be addressed before the explanatory power of education and merit in the creation of the Jewish middle class can be invalidated. As the sociologist Nathan Glazer has commented about the Jews in the postwar period, “while America in general became more markedly middle class in its occupational structure, Jews became even more so.” Needless to say, the expansion of the public sector after World War II, greater access to higher education, and the implementation of
merit-based civil service exams for government employees resulted in disproportionate Jewish representation in the very white-collar public sector professional class from whom Black Powerites would try to wrest control.

The Jewish Clash with Black Power

The conflict over community control in central cities, a subset of the more general New Left rebellion against large bureaucracies and the call for grassroots democracy, resulted in the most serious conflict of all—the New York City teacher's strike of 1968. From the perspective of many inner-city Blacks in the late 1960s, the failure of Northern public school systems to integrate since the Brown decision of 1954 and the continuing academic difficulties experienced by many Black pupils indicated that the white civil service bureaucracies charged with overseeing the public schools had failed. Having been promised integration by the powers that be, Black parents became increasingly frustrated; this frustration coupled with the increasingly obvious fact that Black children were not learning led them to drop their original demand for integration and to substitute a demand for local control.29 In many cases, this put these local Black communities on a collision course with the Jews who had come to staff many of the large-scale urban civil service bureaucracies. In the New York City school system, for example, Jews had replaced Irish-Americans as the majority of teachers, principals, and administrators after the widespread institution of civil service examinations in 1940.30 This situation came to an unfortunate climax in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn in the fall of 1968.

Although formerly a solid Jewish section of Brooklyn, Ocean Hill-Brownsville by 1968 had no white presence except for absentee landlords, shopkeepers, welfare workers, and teachers. As agitation for a larger parental voice in school affairs mounted, Ocean-Hill-Brownsville was designated one of three experimental districts set up with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation. The experiment gave a community-elected neighborhood board and its Black administrator, Rhody McCoy, a measure of local control over policies in the area's eight schools. The project was opposed by the predominantly Jewish United Federation of Teachers (UFT), which feared that decentralization on a citywide basis would damage the union's bargaining power. In the spring of 1968 McCoy, in a controversial use of power, transferred nineteen teachers out of the district without formal charges or hearings, setting the groundwork for a walkout of the 350 teach-
ers in the district and for a series of three strikes later in the fall. Teachers and supervisors spent a total of seven weeks on the picket line, which turned out to be the longest school strike in American history up until that point. The strike paralyzed a school system of more than one million children, sixty thousand teachers and supervisors, and nine hundred schools. What began as a dispute between the Ocean Hill Governing Board and the teachers' union soon turned into a struggle between Black spokesmen and the predominantly Jewish teachers' union.

As the teachers' strike dragged on, ugly manifestations of anti-Semitism and racism emerged. Vulgarities were exchanged between Black parents and picketing teachers. The UFT charged the governing board with inciting violence in the schools themselves. One incident involved the distribution of handbills, written by unknown Black militants, that read "it is impossible for the Middle-East murderers of colored people to possibly bring to this important task the insight, the concern, the exposing of the truth that is a must if the years of brainwashing and self-hatred that has been taught to our Black children by those blood-sucking exploiters and murderers is to be overcome." These handbills had appeared earlier in the spring of 1967, when Robert "Sonny" Carson of Brooklyn CORE held demonstrations to enforce his demand that white principals in Ocean Hill be fired. The UFT, under the direction of Albert Shanker, printed and distributed half a million copies of the leaflet. While a highly controversial report by the New York City chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union accused the UFT of exacerbating racial tensions in the school strike, Shanker and others, including the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, declared that anti-Semitism in New York City was at a "crisis level."

There had been other incidents of intimidation during the strike. A Black teacher named Leslie Campbell, vice president of the Afro-American Teacher's Association, spoke at an Ocean Hill-Brownsville school assembly following the murder of Martin Luther King, at which he incited his audience of twelve- and fifteen-year-olds with the following remarks: "Don't steal toothpaste and combs. Steal things we can use. You know what I mean brothers. . . . When the enemy taps you on the shoulder, send him to the cemetery. You know who your enemy is."

If the youngsters who witnessed Campbell's diatribe were unsure as to exactly who the "enemy" was, Campbell clarified the matter on a subsequent radio show hosted by the Black activist Julius Lester on WBAI-FM. Over the air, Campbell read a poem dedicated to Albert Shanker by one of his fifteen-year-old students.
that read, in part, "hey, Jew Boy, with that yarmulke on your head/you pale-faced Jew Boy—I wish you were dead." 35

In the end, the teachers' union held out, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment failed, and the state suspended the governing board, replacing it with a trusteeship in anticipation of systemwide reform. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy involved misinterpretations, misreadings, and insults on both sides. But perhaps what alarmed the New York Jewish community so much about the school strike was the calm and silence that the instances of Black anti-Semitism elicited from white non-Jews like New York City Mayor John Lindsay and the heads of the Ford Foundation who had helped finance and push the experiment along. Many Jews viewed this as the willingness of a non-Jewish, white "establishment" to sacrifice Jewish interests, embodied in this case in civil service rules and merit-based hiring regulations, in order to keep peace and garner support from a resurgent Black underclass. 36 The union ultimately won the right to return the teachers to the district, and the strike established the UFT as a major force in city and state politics. But the price of victory was high and included the union's image as a liberal and socially progressive force. Be that as it may, the relationship between Blacks and Jews in New York was permanently damaged by the strikes, which effectively weakened the city's liberal political coalition. 37

The impression of many Jews that there were large numbers of whites, including large numbers of Jews, who were willing to acquiesce to Black demands for more political power and control even at the expense of treasured liberal values was reinforced by events that occurred surrounding the school strike. One of these events involved Thomas Hoving, the white, gentile director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In 1968 the Met exhibited a show titled "Harlem on My Mind." While the show was picketed by some Harlem Blacks for giving what they felt was a romanticized portrait of Harlem life as seen through white eyes, the biggest uproar came from some in the Jewish community who were disturbed by the introduction to the catalogue of the show, written by a sixteen-year-old Black girl, which read, in part, "[B]ehind every hurdle that the Afro-American has to jump stands the Jew who has already cleared it." The young girl went on to declare that anti-Semitism helps Blacks to feel more completely American. After a deluge of protests, the museum hastily included a paragraph of disclaimer, which the American Jewish Congress noted, was "half-hearted and did not end the libel against Jews." 38

Once again, the response of the director of the museum seemed to rankle
more than the Black teenager’s prose. Hoving declared, “[H]er statements are true. If the truth hurts, so be it.”39 Hoving himself later admitted that he could have used more tact in handling the situation.40

Another troubling incident was the selection in 1968 of John Hatchett by New York University to direct its new Martin Luther King Afro-American Student Center. Hatchett, a former New York City public school teacher, had authored an article in the Afro-American Teacher’s Forum titled, “The Phenomenon of the Anti-Black Jews and the Black Anglo-Saxon: A Study in Educational Perfidy,” which accused Jewish educators of mentally poisoning Black pupils.41 President Hester and other officials at New York University were allegedly not aware of the article when they hired Hatchett, but they sought the help of former Supreme Court justice and United Nations Ambassador Arthur Goldberg in investigating the matter. After speaking with Hatchett personally, Goldberg informed President Hester of his belief that Hatchett understood the injustices and dangers contained in his article and recommended the continuation of his appointment. Hester, in his August 9 announcement that the university would retain Hatchett, stated that he did not believe Hatchett was an anti-Semite in the “classic sense” and that “I think it is true that there is a preponderance of Jewish teachers and administrators. . . . I can understand how someone might make references and still not be anti-Semitic.”42 While many Jewish leaders were outraged by Hester’s response, they need only have waited two more months for Hatchett to seal his own fate. On October 8, speaking before seven hundred students at NYU’s Bronx campus, Hatchett called Albert Shanker and other white political leaders “racist bastards,” which led to his prompt dismissal as director of the Center. Nevertheless, an agreement was worked out with Black students by which Hatchett was permitted to stay on as an “adviser” and was provided university office space.43

The demand for Afro-American or Black Studies programs in universities across the country came from a growing feeling among Black students and scholars that the treatment of the Black experience in standard college curricula had been woefully inadequate. Since the basic impetus for Black studies programs originated with Black students on mixed-race university campuses, many of whom were influenced by the student revolts against university bureaucracies, the push for a separate Black studies curriculum was also accompanied by efforts of Black students to retain a say in the development of such programs.44 Only a few months after the New York public school crisis, sixty-five out of 103 Black students at the nonsectarian
Jewish-sponsored Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, occupied an administration building in protest against the university administration. Led by a Black Jew, the Black militants announced the establishment of Malcolm X University in the center of Brandeis and demanded that a Black Studies program be instituted at the school in which Black students would have a say in the hiring of faculty and in the design of the curriculum. The militants accused the administration of having a "racist attitude," which must have been discouraging to university president Morris Abram, a man who not only served on the United States Civil Rights Commission but who was instrumental in obtaining Martin Luther King Jr.’s release from a DeKalb county prison in 1960 and who spearheaded the legal fight against the white domination of Southern politics. Abram took a laid-back approach to the crisis at Brandeis, refusing to call the police and carrying on the business of the school from other buildings. Eventually, the militants ended their holdout and a Black Studies Department was created, though on a basis that was satisfactory to the Brandeis faculty.

A more academically damaging and psychologically painful experience for many Jews was the crisis at the City University of New York (CUNY) over the demands of Black and Puerto Rican students for "open admissions" and other changes. City College had been a Jewish enclave for almost three-quarters of a century, primarily because Jews had attended college at two to three times the rate of non-Jewish Americans and because an overwhelming proportion of those students were poor and had no choice but to attend a free college like City. Pre-World War II quotas in most of the Ivy League schools also helped to determine Jewish college-going decisions in favor of CUNY. Jews treated City College much as they did the public school system, as an entrance to the emerging meritocracy of the professions. While the faculty at City had only one truly renowned scholar in the philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen, the intellectual atmosphere fostered by the student body of second-generation immigrant Jews created a college experience of the first order. "It was an extraordinary education," said one alumnus. "At the very least, it was the equal of the best schools in terms of the range of subjects and the depth with which they were studied." As a recent author described it, City College at the zenith of its glory was "a den of precocious boys, at once coddled and driven by their parents, pail and frail, fierce and argumentative, pushy, awkward, sensitive, naive, and fearful."

But in the spring of 1969, Black militants and Puerto Rican students occupied university buildings and succeeded in shutting down the campus
Jewish presence at CUNY quickly dissipated, going from an absolute majority to 37 percent by 1971.

John Kennedy proposed a civil rights bill in 1963 and President Lyndon Johnson continued the effort, which culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Congressional opponents like Senator James Eastland represented the most obvious way in which Black Power activism clashed with the principle of equal opportunity long considered to be a hallmark of American liberalism. Affirmative action had its origins in the early 1960s, when the term “affirmative action” was inserted by Kennedy administration staffers into Executive Order 10925, which banned discrimination in hiring by federal contractors. Nobody paid much attention to the phrase until John Kennedy proposed a civil rights bill in 1963 and President Lyndon Johnson continued the effort, which culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Congressional opponents like Senator James Eastland

as they waited for a list of five demands to be satisfied. The demands consisted of a Black and Puerto Rican freshmen orientation program under Black and Puerto Rican control; a degree-granting school of “Black and Puerto Rican Studies,” with student control over hiring; an expansion of the school’s remedial programs; a demand that the student body represent the ethnic composition of the public high schools in New York City; and a demand that all students preparing to teach in public schools acquire basic proficiency in Spanish and “Black and Puerto Rican heritage.”

After the closing of the campus, court orders to open the college resulted in rioting among white and Black students. Black militants took over classrooms, beating students who would not comply with their demands. Eventually, after a long and difficult struggle, the college adopted an open admissions policy that admitted all students who had graduated with an eighty average or higher from city high schools or who had been in the top half of their graduating class into one of CUNY’s senior colleges and accepted all other students into one of the system’s community colleges. While some critics have commented that in acquiescing to the demands of Black militants, City College created an environment friendly to increasing anti-Semitism, for most interested Jews the policy of open admissions at CUNY was most disturbing. The decline of standards that so many Jews and others had begun to associate with the panoply of Black demands for preferential treatment had hit home in a sacred institution of American Jewish life. The Jewish presence at CUNY quickly dissipated, going from an absolute majority to 37 percent by 1971.

Affirmative Action, the “White” Jew, and Black Anti-Semitism

Open admissions was just one component of extensive Black demands for preferential treatment, commonly referred to as “affirmative action,” and represented the most obvious way in which Black Power activism clashed with the principle of equal opportunity long considered to be a hallmark of American liberalism. Affirmative action had its origins in the early 1960s, when the term “affirmative action” was inserted by Kennedy administration staffers into Executive Order 10925, which banned discrimination in hiring by federal contractors. Nobody paid much attention to the phrase until John Kennedy proposed a civil rights bill in 1963 and President Lyndon Johnson continued the effort, which culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Congressional opponents like Senator James Eastland
of Mississippi opposed the civil rights bill, claiming that it would impose quotas against whites. Consequently, a sentence was added that explicitly rejected quotas. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which was created by the act, was also stripped of enforcement power and so could not impose quotas. But, in 1965, the concept received its greatest push when President Johnson gave a speech at Howard University in which he used a phrase supplied by a young Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "We seek ... not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result." Shortly after the speech, Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, which made affirmative action programs the responsibility of an obscure division of the Department of Labor that operated outside the pressure of public scrutiny. For this reason this Executive Order has been called an "invisible milestone." The original Executive Order required only that employees search aggressively for qualified minority applicants, who would then be put in the same pool as other applicants for selection. But by the late 1960s, the merit-based, bureaucratic structure of large organizations proved to be a difficult employment obstacle for many Blacks, most of whom had received inferior education and other social preparations for the taking of standardized tests. Many advocates of affirmative action, both white and Black, viewed achievement in school and test-taking to be too narrow a criterion for the selection of job candidates, or even for college admission. As one writer put it, the "history of affirmative action can be seen as a struggle over the fairness of the modern meritocracy, with minorities arguing that educational measures shouldn't be the deciding factor in who gets ahead and opponents of affirmative action saying that to bend the criteria for Blacks is to discriminate unfairly against more deserving whites." 52

All of this concerned American Jews a great deal, since large segments of American Jewry had benefited so marvelously from the growth of merit-based advancement. More to the point, those professions in which Jews tended to cluster—public school teaching and other civil service work, college teaching, medicine, and law—were all areas in which affirmative action, whether in hiring or training, would be heavily instituted. The Jewish community has always exhibited sharply contrasting views on affirmative action, but there is no doubt that the system of racial preferences as it came to be implemented presented a dilemma for American Jewish identity.

As implemented, affirmative action represented a public recognition not only that Blacks were a particularly disadvantaged minority, a presumption
with which many Jews would have undoubtedly agreed, but also that Jews no longer were, a presumption that necessitated a serious reconsideration of Jewish identity. The affirmative action designation of Jews as privileged whites was later made official in the 1973 Office of Management and Budget Statistical Directive Number Fifteen, the little noticed federal document that carved out the five official racial categories according to which so many institutions of American life now function. The directive presumed that those individuals who fell into the “African American,” “Asian American,” “Puerto Rican/Latino,” and “Native American/Pacific Islander” categories had been oppressed by those who were in the fifth category, “non-Hispanic whites,” to which American Jews now belonged. The implications of this directive for Jews were brought to light in the 1977 Supreme Court case United Jewish Organizations v. Carey, in which members of the Hasidic community in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, sued New York state, claiming that the redrawing of electoral districts to ensure the election of minority legislators discriminated against them. The Supreme Court concluded that Hasidic Jews, along with persons of Irish, Polish, or Italian descent, were not within the scope of civil rights protections defined by federal law. “Presumably,” writes one critic of that case, “the abstract interests of Hasidim as whites (if such interests exist) were more fundamental than their interests as Hasidic Jews. After all, Hasidim and Italian-American Catholics are part of the same racial community, according to Statistical Directive 15.”

While the question of when and to what extent Jews became legally and socially “white” remains a matter of substantial scholarly inquiry, there is no question that the widespread implementation of race preferences represented the most complete and formal recognition of the Jews’ status as privileged whites. It was this public association of Jews with the rights and privileges of all other white people that presented the most serious challenge of the Black Power movement to Jewish identity. For although affirmative action eventually widened its base of beneficiaries to include women, the original concept was exclusively racial. Jewish identity had been so enmeshed with a history of suffering that Jewish leaders and intellectuals found it immensely difficult to envision themselves as privileged whites, the way most Black Power advocates saw them. The difficulty American Jews had with adjusting to their civic whiteness, and the virulence with which Black Power leaders insisted upon it, provides a window through which the cultural uncertainty of both Black Americans and American Jews can be clearly seen. Not only is an identity dependent on victim
status a cultural bane for the Jewish community in the United States, but the animosity fostered in the Black community by Jewish insistence on this status is an indication of the crippled and lopsided development of Black identity as well.57

On the surface, Black Power advocates lamented Jewish involvement in Black affairs because it prevented Blacks from developing a program politically and culturally more suitable for themselves. But a closer look at the work of Harold Cruse and others reveals that the Black Power disdain for the involvement of Jews in Black affairs is somewhat more complicated. What seemed to bother Cruse and others sympathetic to Black Power about Jews was their ambivalent racial identity. Black Power advocates found that, among Black Americans, dark skin and the low status imposed on individuals who possessed it was the most salient and powerful unifying force. Lacking any other universally shared cultural values as powerful as the experience of oppression around which to rally, advocates of Black Power found that their most useful tool for consolidating Black opinion was to stake out the ground of racial oppression as theirs alone and to stand toe to toe against a monolithic white majority. Black Power theorists saw that dealing with Jews and other white ethnics as distinct groups with different histories and varying levels of opportunity and acceptance would reduce the strength of Black claims. Moreover, this strategy was in keeping with the history of most Black Americans, who rarely experienced white power and privilege as ethnically differentiated. For them, American pluralism had always been defined in terms of a biracial polity in which Blacks made up theoretically one-half of the racial dichotomy. Since Jews were the white ethnic group with the strongest collective memory of exclusion and oppression, it was essential that Black Power theorists reduce the history of the Jews to only their experience in the United States, which was relatively privileged, and to the color of their skin, which was relatively white. In the view of Black Power, the tortured history of the Jews might cause them to think that their place in the United States remained alongside oppressed Blacks, but this was no longer a tolerable situation for anyone interested in linking race to persecution in order to unite Blacks and to secure privileges. This motivation was laid bare in Cruse’s *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.

Ostensibly, Cruse believed that Jews, whether in the Communist party of the 1930s, the interracial coalition of the postwar decades, or the social sciences, had become the biggest problem for Blacks precisely because they had so identified with the Black struggle in the United States. "What has
further complicated this emergence of Afro-American ethnic consciousness is the Jewish involvement in this interracial process over the last fifty-odd years. The role of American Jews as political mediator between Negro and Anglo-Saxon must be terminated by Negroes themselves.”58 But Cruse’s disdain for Jewish involvement in Black affairs goes way beyond his concerns about its alleged negative impact on Black leadership capability or Black nationalist ideology. Cruse’s central concern about Jews as they relate to Black Americans was their ambiguous relationship to power and oppression.

As Cruse explains it, his Jewish problem begins with the predominance of Jews in the Communist party of the 1930s, a period in which scholars like Herbert Aptheker and other assimilated Jewish Communists assumed the mantle of leadership on Black matters, thus burying the Black radical potential in the slough of white intellectual paternalism. It was Cruse’s impression that, while the Jewish Communists repeatedly acted to squelch any nationalistic eruptions among the Black Communists, they rigorously pursued every available strategy to preserve Jewish cultural identity. The Communist party under Jewish influence, therefore, not capitalism, had begun the “great brainwashing of Negro radical intellectuals” and established theoretical dominance over Black Americans.59

But Cruse’s interpretation of the Jews’ role in the Communist party is troubling. To be sure, his resentment toward the white paternalism of the Communist party was well founded, as was his belief that the Communist party promoted Black Americans into leadership positions in the party but effectively controlled them from behind the scenes.60 But Cruse’s experience with Jewish Communists who were wildly nationalistic and concerned with specific Jewish issues appears not to have been representative. Jewish Communists were generally individuals who sought to transcend the divisions between people and who no longer thought of themselves as Jewish. Most Jewish radicals were in fact opposed to Zionism, not only because they were opposed to most expressions of nationalism but because they believed it to be an inadequate answer to the “Jewish problem” and a diversion from the true business of revolution.61 On the matter of the Communist party position on Jewish issues, one sociologist of Jews and Communism has stated that “on occasion, the party took certain positions on Jewish issues which were attractive to Jews, but in general there was no group in the population for which the party showed more contempt and disdain, in its formulations of specific party positions, than the Jews.”62

For most of the period from the 1920s through the 1950s, the party re-
mained staunchly anti-Zionist. For the Communists, the main enemy in Palestine was British imperialism, backed by Zionism. “We must not let up the attack on Zionism, despite the endangering of the United Front with Jewish organizations,” read one party directive. For a brief period between 1944 and 1949, when the Soviet Union was allied with Britain, the Communist party was able to adopt a program more supportive of a Jewish homeland, but the party never backed free immigration to Palestine.63

Reading Cruse with all of this in mind suggests that his problem with Jews had less to do with the dominance of Jewish Communists over party policy than it did with the ambivalent racial status that Communist party membership implied. The Communist party appealed to certain Jews because it offered the promise of theoretical equality to members of an historically oppressed group. But the work of consolidating a Black polity around race and oppression that the Black Powerites had embarked on required the elimination of any white ethnic claims to cultural oppression or group vulnerability. Accordingly, Cruse argued that Jews had lost their place among the “have-nots” and gained a place among the “haves.” “In America, Jews have no real problems, political, economic, or cultural. And they have no honest cause for complaints about anti-Semitism . . . one might just as easily say that having become the most affluent group in America . . . despite anti-Semitism, is too much of a cross for American Jews to bear under ‘democratic’ capitalism!”64 Like other Black nationalists, Cruse internationalized this change in Jewish status by relating it to the State of Israel. Today, “American Jews are a power in the land and should act accordingly. Behind this power, of course, is the State of Israel, which immeasurably enhances the new status of American Jewry as a ‘have’ group.”65 Cruse believed that the suffering Jews had experienced in Europe had very little bearing on the American experience, and it is here that he reveals his real Jewish problem. “One cannot deny the horror of the European Holocaust, but for all practical purposes (political, economic, and cultural) as far as Negroes are concerned, Jews have not suffered in the United States. They have, in fact, done exceptionally well on every level of endeavor, from a nationalist premise or on an assimilated status.” In the United States, according to Cruse, it is Black Americans who are history’s chosen people, and now they want to “play this game. When that happens, woe be to the side that is short on numbers,” Cruse wrote in an ominous warning to American Jews.66 Ultimately, for Cruse, the problem was not so much that Jewish activists historically had opposed Black nationalism
and favored Jewish nationalism but that Jewish activism implied Jewish victimization, which diluted the Black claim to unchallenged victimhood and denied them the political advantages accruing to such a status.

Cruse was not alone in his attempt to eliminate American Jews in the battle for the title of supreme victim. Evidence from the late 1960s shows that other Black intellectuals sympathetic to Black Power were preoccupied with this “Jewish problem” as well. In his attempt to explain Black anti-Semitism, James Baldwin wrote that one “does not wish ... to be told by an American Jew that his suffering is as great as the American Negro’s suffering. It isn’t, and one knows that it isn’t from the very tone in which he assures you that it is.” To Baldwin, the Jew in America was white, and because of this he had the advantages afforded whiteness. “For it is not here, and not now, that the Jew is being slaughtered, and he is never despised, here, as the Negro is, because he is an American.”67

If the relationship of Jews to power continued to be a confusing and troubling question for American Jews, Black Power theorists and activists suffered from no such confusion and wanted to make it known in the clearest terms just how much of a part of the white power structure Jews had become. Some Black Power theorists and activists portrayed Jews not just as white oppressors but as perhaps the most oppressive of all whites. This impulse had been present in Black nationalist ideology from the very beginning. The theology of the Black Muslims taught not only that whites were devils but that a “big-headed scientist” named Yacub, or Jacob, the Jewish patriarch, had been the mad scientist who created the white race in a cave, out of which they were eventually led, Jews first, by Moses, to wreak havoc on Black people, God’s original creation.68 The rhetorical patterns assumed in the effort to erase the claim of the Jews on the white conscience reverberated in the language used by those sympathetic with the goals of Black Power in the late 1960s. James Baldwin minced no words in explaining why this was so. “In the American context, the most ironical thing about Negro anti-Semitism is that the Negro is really condemning the Jew for having become an American white man—for having become, in effect, a Christian. . . . The Jew does not realize that the credential he offers, the fact that he has been despised and slaughtered, does not increase the Negro’s understanding. It increases the Negro’s rage.”69

The attempt of Black Power radicals to minimize the severity and importance of Jewish suffering was most conspicuous in the usurpation of the language of the Holocaust. The use of such terms as “genocide” and “ho-
locaust” to describe the situation of Black Americans seemed pervasive among even some of the most prominent leaders in the Black community. In February 1967, Stokely Carmichael told a Black audience in Oakland that “we are not talking about politics tonight, we’re not talking about economics tonight, we’re talking about the survival of a race of people. . . . Many of us feel . . . that they are getting ready to commit genocide against us.” In 1968, even a leader of Martin Luther King’s integrationist Southern Christian Leadership Conference said that “genocide” is a danger.70 James Baldwin, who earlier in the decade had forecast the Black radicalism of the late 1960s in his essay The Fire Next Time, also lent himself toward this kind of extremism. At one point he asserted that “white America appears to be seriously considering the possibilities of mass extermination.”71 Even when Baldwin attempted to be conciliatory, he was tied to the imagery of the Nazi genocide. In a well-publicized letter of resignation from the editorial board of the Black magazine Liberator, which, ironically, had published an article Baldwin thought was anti-Semitic, Baldwin stated that he did not think America would survive the current storm in race relations. “Nor should she,” Baldwin claimed. “She is responsible for this holocaust in which the living writhe. . . . We are a criminal nation, built on a lie, and, as the world cannot use us, it will presently find some way of disposing of us.”72 Baldwin’s use of Holocaust iconology eventually involved him in a heated exchange with the Jewish editor of the Zionist monthly Midstream. In an article that appeared in the New York Review of Books titled “An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis,” Baldwin compared the indicted Communist conspirator to a Jewish woman headed for a concentration camp in Nazi Germany, writing, “[Y]ou look exceedingly alone, say, as the Jewish housewife in the boxcar headed for Dachau.” In a fiery essay, Shlomo Katz of Midstream accused Baldwin of comparing the American criminal justice system with Nazism.73

In a conspicuous effort at historical role reversal, one Black Power spokesman even compared American Jews to Nazis. Julius Lester wrote that in America it was Blacks “who are the Jews. . . . There is no need for Black people to wear yellow stars of David on their sleeves; that star of David is all over us. And the greatest irony of all is that it is the Jews who are in the position of being Germans.” Demonstrating Black Power’s refusal to recognize gradations in power among whites, Lester argued that Black Americans were a colonized people who were not in a position to make fine distinctions among the colonizers. “Everyone else, the nonblacks, are
the colonizers, and Jews are no exception because they hold only a measure of that power. It is power, and the establishment maintains its power partially through Jews."\(^74\)

Cruse, Baldwin, and the others were not wrong in insisting that racism and anti-Semitism in the United States were of a quite different order. They were not wrong to insist that Jews and Blacks were not "in the same boat" as far as the attitude of white gentiles was concerned. American racism had in a very real way helped define and shape American history, whereas American anti-Semitism had not even constituted a small chapter of it. But it was quite another thing to deny the tenacity of Jewish memory, to deny to American Jews the psychological impact of their history and to disparage the tentativeness with which they viewed their own status in the United States. In a sobering observation, one Jewish writer later commented, "True enough, neither memory nor possibility degrades us here and now, as here and now degrade the Black. . . . [But] how shall we react when . . . Baldwin tells us that our evocation of our past is an occasion for Black rage, when, that is, he asks us to deny our past?"\(^75\)

But despite the unrealistic and often offensive approach the Black Power theorists took, there can be no question they had struck the bull's eye in reading the American Jewish psyche. Black radicals were in large measure correct to see Jewish involvement in Black affairs as a reflection of Jewish identity based on the memory of persecution that no longer spoke to the Jewish present. By the late 1960s, it seems that the phenomenon of religious tolerance had begun to filter down into even the most stubbornly resistant areas of American life. Before 1960, for example, appointments of Jews to high-level college administrative posts were almost unheard of. By the end of the 1960s, such appointments had been made at a number of major institutions, including the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale Law School, and Harvard Law School.\(^76\) Jewish representation on college faculties and in the student body hit record numbers during this period. In 1971 Jews made up 17 percent of all students at private universities.\(^77\) The opening up of new opportunities for Jews took place in just about all occupations and industries. Not only were Jews prominent among the elite literary critics and editors by the 1960s, but they were increasingly influential in the fields of journalism, publishing, and television broadcasting as well.\(^78\) The postwar resistance of large corporations to hiring Jewish graduates of prestigious colleges and business schools virtually collapsed in the 1960s and 1970s, as such traditionally non-Jewish companies as Du Pont, Bell Labs, AT&T,
Chrysler, Colgate-Palmolive, and Ford appointed Jews to the highest management positions. In addition to these corporations, historically gentile law firms, stock trading companies, and real estate brokerages began to hire on the basis of merit, as more sophisticated skills and knowledge replaced "good breeding" as prerequisites for applicants at firms wishing to maintain their position on the fast track. The face of American politics began to change as well. While Jewish political candidates in largely non-Jewish areas historically faced uphill battles getting elected to office, by the 1960s the gentile resistance to Jewish candidates had started to unravel. Between 1937 and 1961 the proportion of Americans surveyed who said they would not vote for a qualified Jew for president dropped from 46 percent to 23 percent (to 7 percent in 1983). In short, by the late 1960s and early 1970s the United States was open to American Jews (as well as to individuals from other historically marginalized groups) in all of its most important facets.

The pressing issue for American Jews at this time was, therefore, not the danger of external threat or the challenge of expanding civil rights but internal dissolution. As early as 1950, the Jewish immigrant world and its Yiddish press, synagogues, theater, and literature were passing from the Jewish scene, as was the Jewish character of the trade unions. The majority of immigrant Jews had been ritually orthodox but possessed only a superficial knowledge of Jewish religious thought, leaving later generations of American Jews without a substantive pool of knowledge from which to draw. The respected conservative rabbi Robert Gordis testified to the seriousness of the cultural crisis in American Judaism when he wrote in 1955 that the "ills of American Jewry, its vast shapelessness, the incredibly low level of Jewish knowledge, its consequently easy surrender to vulgarity and emptiness . . . all these have persisted too long to be discounted as signs of immaturity or as mere growing pains." In the words of the historian Lloyd Gartner, American Jewish religious and cultural life "was dominated by the quest for an American form of religious tradition and by the effort to maintain institutions unaided by government or federations of Jewish philanthropies."

In their attempt to redefine how the world saw Jewish people by relocating them permanently on the white side of an international racial divide, Black Power theorists and activists hit on a Jewish identity problem that has vexed Jews since the age of Enlightenment. The problem of recasting Jewish identity outside the land of Israel, in a society of relative freedom and opportunity, as something other than a response to external attack and a commitment to progressive causes would emerge as the pre-
dominant issue for American Jewry at the close of the twentieth century. The problem is one that afflicts all people who have been historically victimized. In the words of one critic, the dilemma for the Jews is that “an honorable life is not possible if they remember too little and a normal life is not possible if they remember too much.” The manner in which most Jewish intellectuals and leaders approached the issue of Black Power and the political radicalism of the late 1960s is, almost in its entirety, a reflection of the Jewish struggle with this fundamental question of selfhood.

*Black Power, the New Left, and the Jews*

As already mentioned, in the last half of the twentieth century Jewish identity developed with two fundamental emphases, liberalism and the idea of Jewish community. By the late 1960s, Israel had emerged as the central focus of Jewish group-mindedness, and, just as liberalism had come under attack, so, too, had Jewish nationalism. The Six-Day War, in 1967, reactivated feelings for the Jewish state in American Jews that had laid dormant since Israel’s birth in 1948 and that many American Jews did not themselves know they had. On the eve of the war, Rabbi Morris Kertzer was able to write that American Jews “find difficulty in feeling the peoplehood of Israel, the mystical bond that unites them with their coreligionists outside the United States.” But the crisis of 1967 was severe enough to evoke a flood of emotion in the American Jewish community.

There was no question that the central role played by the Holocaust in the minds of American Jews deeply affected their view of the Six-Day War. Many in the Jewish community sustained a lingering guilt over not having done enough to save European Jews, and Israel was considered the only saving grace of that ghastly event, a constant reminder for many that Jews must fend for themselves. When Israel’s Arab enemies surrounded the Jewish state in 1967, many American Jews believed that the coming war might very well result in the second genocidal calamity for Jews in a span of twenty-five years, and Arab leaders gave them every reason to think that this might be so. On May 28, President Aref of Iraq told Iraqi soldiers, “This is the day of battle . . . we are determined and united to achieve our clear aim—to remove Israel from the map.” Ahmed Shukeiry, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, declared that hardly a Jew would survive to be repatriated to Europe. With the possibility of another Holocaust on their minds, American Jews responded as they never had previously to any
world crisis. Between the day when Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser closed the Gulf of Aqaba on May 23 and the end of the war on June 10, well over one hundred million dollars was raised for the Israel Emergency Fund of the United Jewish Appeal. While there had been vocal anti-Zionist minorities within the American Jewish community, pollsters found that 99 percent of all the Jews in America supported the Israeli position in 1967. Even the militant anti-Zionist group the American Council for Judaism refrained from making public statements until the war was over.\(^87\) In June 1967, more than seventy-five hundred American Jews volunteered to take over the civilian jobs of Israelis who were serving in the armed forces. One man arrived at the Jewish Agency in New York on June 5 and offered his two sons for combat in Israel in lieu of the money he could not afford to donate. Purchases of Israeli bonds soared by more than 130 percent.\(^88\)

As sensitivities were raised by the war, it became clear to many Jews that the two most important aspects of American Jewish identity, the commitment to liberalism and the State of Israel, had come under serious attack. Liberalism and Israel always had their enemies, but this time the attacks were disturbing because they came from former allies on the left, rather than from those on the right—that is, by Black Americans in the Black Power movement and by formerly friendly whites, now a part of the radicalized New Left. The radicalization of the New Left is an integral part of the story of the rise of Black Power and how American Jews related to it, not only because young Jews made up a disproportionately large contingent of the New Left but because the history of the New Left in the 1960s so closely paralleled the development of Black Power. As one student leader put it regarding the central body of the New Left, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), “SDS has consistently supported the political viewpoints and actions of the most militant segments of the Black movement and has consciously shaped its own analysis and program in response to those elements as they have evolved during the sixties from Malcolm X to SNCC to the Black Panther party.”\(^89\) In many crucial respects, the New Left and Black Power must be analyzed as part of the same phenomenon.

The New Left had its origins in the civil rights protests in the South of the early 1960s. In 1962, while still the student wing of the Democratic Socialist League for Industrial Democracy, SDS had issued its famous Port Huron statement, which emphasized the complicity of big government and big corporations in the exploitation of the common man and the involvement of common people in the solutions to their problems. The authors of the statement defined America’s problems not so much in terms of class
divisions, as the “old” left had, but rather in terms of the spiritual deprivation experienced by most people as a result of elites that had captured large institutions, rendering average citizens powerless, apathetic, alienated, and without community. The New Left concerned itself with essentially three areas: the Vietnam War and, by extension, the role of the United States in world affairs; equality for Black Americans and, by extension, other subjugated peoples throughout the world; and the role of students in campus administration and curriculum development.

But the humanism of the Port Huron Statement would soon be transformed into violence and nihilism. Lacking a clear method by which to achieve their goals, the college students who made up the heart of the movement, radical student leaders like Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and Mark Rudd, social theorists like Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, and the violence of the Vietnam War combined to radicalize the New Left. At various points during 1965 and after, New Left students moved to shut down army induction centers and campus ROTCs, burned draft cards, and participated in campus sit-ins. Eventually, New Leftists became enamored of such radical Third World revolutionaries as Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, and Mao Tse-tung and of the colonial analogy many Black spokespersons had ascribed to ghetto conditions in the United States. By the late 1960s, the New Left began to resemble the old left in its factionalism. The mainstream SDS, which adhered to the view of Third World revolutionaries, struggled for dominance of the movement with the Progressive Labor Party, the more militant and orthodox Marxists. By 1969, the mainstream SDS had formed a committee called the Weathermen, which believed that the monster of capitalism would be slain by Third World uprisings abroad and Black uprisings at home and that whites, the beneficiaries of “white skin privilege,” would be unable to participate. After 1969, the Weathermen eventually went underground to plan bombings against capitalism and so fully accepted a program of violence that the cult murderer Charles Manson became a party hero.

The rise of the New Left contributed to the feeling of many middle-class Jews that their interests were under attack. Both the violence the New Left committed and the violence it solicited from police scared Jews, many of whom feared they would suffer if the regular procedures of government and the maintenance of law and order were not upheld. The New Left opposition to bureaucracies of all kinds implied that it was opposed to those institutions that embodied the concept of merit-based advancement, particularly within governmental and educational institutions, in which Jews
found a great deal of success. By 1969, one observer noted that "teaching in the university may not turn out to be as good a job as nice Jewish boys used to think." Jewish academics and intellectuals have produced a number of studies and memoirs that reflect widespread disillusionment with the eruption of the universities and the changes it wrought.93

At the landmark National New Politics Convention of 1967 in Chicago, the radicalism of the New Left and the Black Power movements converged, alienating many Jewish radicals. At the convention, the SNCC leader James Forman marched into the convention surrounded by men with dashikis and declared himself "dictator." The convention then voted to give Black delegates 50 percent of the votes, thus handing the convention over to their control. The young Martin Peretz, a financial benefactor of the convention and a future editor of the New Republic magazine, reported that he was sickened when he witnessed a Jewish radical screaming at one of the caucuses, "After four hundred years of slavery, it is right that whites should be castrated!"94 The conference became a forum for Black militants, who eventually drafted the policy statement on the Middle East that the convention endorsed. The statement put the convention on record as condemning the "Imperialist Zionist war" of 1967. An alternative resolution calling for Arabs to respect pre-1967 borders was rejected out of hand. Increasingly, a movement that had once been dominated by middle-class white, often Jewish, students had become a movement dominated by Black militants and pro-Third World, often Jewish, revolutionaries. In the words of one New Left journalist, "The New Left caucus meeting in Chicago caused the first real crisis of conscience for the Jewish radicals in the left establishment when it condemned Zionism and the basic validity of a Jewish homeland and nation."95

Jews on the Left and Black Power

If the violence and anti-Zionist positions of the New Left frightened some Jews, the disproportionate and sometimes very vocal appearance of radical Jews who supported the New Left or were associated with it came as no surprise to those familiar with the legacy of Jewish political radicalism. The history of Jews in radical movements is long and strewn with examples of the flagrant disregard for mainstream Jewish concerns. Jews had been associated with liberal-left politics since the French Revolution, primarily because that revolution was associated throughout Europe with the belief
in equal citizenship and the overthrow of reactionary monarchies. But with the liberalism of the revolution, as with all things, there was a price to pay. In the case of the Jews, the price to be paid would be their dissolution as a distinct people, a presumption held by the leaders of the revolution itself. French politician Clermon-Tonnere told the French parliament after the revolution that “one must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation, but one must give them everything as individuals.” The implicit assumption of liberal-left ideology was that Jews would become citizens no different from anyone else and that all forms of parochial identity and tribal loyalties would disappear when exposed to the light of reason and freedom. The left’s inclination to view Jewish particularism as reactionary, tribal, and unmodern was epitomized by the Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, who commented that “I have no separate corner in my heart for the [Jewish] ghetto: I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.”

There remained, however, another, perhaps more specific Jewish problem for the socialist wings of the liberal left. While many socialist and Communist movements have supported equal citizenship for Jews, the association of Jews with capitalism and their disproportionate representation among businessmen, traders, and merchants often proved a thorn in the side of radical movements. One of the ways that socialists and Marxists of the nineteenth century dealt with this problem was to interpret anti-Semitism among the masses as a first step in the formation of class consciousness. Talk of “Jewish bankers” and “Jewish conspiracy” for many radicals was a necessary step in learning hatred toward all capitalists, irrespective of religious background. The rise of the Narodnaya Volya anticzarist movement in the late nineteenth century was hailed by many young Jewish leftists as evidence that the revolution was under way. Three of the twenty-eight members of the executive committee of this organization, which called for a pogrom in 1881 against the czar, the nobility, and the Jews, were themselves Jewish. The betrayal of the Jews by Jews on the left was exemplified by the debate among French socialists over whether to support the cause of the Jewish French army captain Alfred Dreyfus, a victim of French anti-Semitism who had been falsely accused of espionage. For the revolutionary French left, Dreyfus was a professional soldier, a captain in the Army, and they allowed for no distinction among militarists, even those who were being persecuted for being Jewish.

The inclination of Jewish radicals to sympathize with, or at least to tolerate, the grass-roots anti-Semitism of the masses was evident in the
1960s and was perhaps even more obvious than in the past because much of the “grass-roots” anti-Semitism in the United States came from Black radicals, whose leadership position in the revolutionary movement was beyond dispute. For many Jews on the left, Blacks were not accountable for their own human foibles to the same extent as whites because of their oppressed status, and Black anti-Semitism was seen as the fault of whites and/or Jews. Even some old-time Jewish leftists sided with the radical Black Power crowd and defended it from charges of anti-Semitism. The longtime radical journal *Jewish Currents* and its editor, Morris Schappes, continued to throw support behind SNCC after its turn toward anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, even while revealing the traditional hostility of Communists toward nationalism of any kind. While Schappes wrote that “white liberal progressives can best combat Black nationalism where it exists by multiplying their activity to enforce the laws and achieve integration,” Schappes threw his support behind the newly radicalized James Baldwin and the cause of the Black Panthers. Schappes wrote that Black anti-Semitism was not a harmful form of anti-Semitism because it was “a defensive, not an aggressive, anti, no matter how shrilly it is sounded.”

Another old-left Jew with a good deal of sympathy for much that had been done by the New Left was the world-renowned linguist Noam Chomsky, who defended the “Black Liberation” movement and the Black Panthers against charges of anti-Semitism. The Panthers had supported the terrorism of the Palestine Liberation Organization and were particularly vituperative toward Israel’s supporters in the United States. The June 1967 issue of the Black Panther journal *Black Power* published a song parody that included the following lines: “The Jews have stolen all our bread/Their filthy women tricked our men into bed/... We’re gonna burn their towns and... piss upon the Wailing Wall/... That will be ecstasy/killing every Jew we see.” Nevertheless, Chomsky declared “that the widely voiced claims regarding the alleged anti-Semitism of the Panthers and other groups seems to me severely distorted and misleading,” and he complained that Jewish fears of widespread anti-Semitism in the Black Panther party were “so ignorant as to deserve no further comment.”

Some leftist Jewish intellectuals accepted Black Power’s theory that the only thing significant about Jews in the United States was their white skin and that they were not only heirs to the privileges and power of whiteness but were also guilty of the racism and bigotry of white Christian civilization. The journalist Nat Hentoff revealed his belief that the sum total of being Jewish amounted to being oppressed and that therefore American
Jews, who were no longer oppressed, were not really Jews anymore. “Even more astonishing,” Hentoff wrote, playing on the Nazi analogy, “we have been supplanted as Jews . . . . We are, all of us who are white, the goyim in America. The further question is: which among us are the Germans?”

Some Jews of the old left made cause with the New Left position on Israel. While support for Israel among the old left was never strong, there was a certain sympathy with the Labor government that ruled the young state. But after the Six-Day War, scholars like Jerrold Katz and Noam Chomsky signed anti-Zionist petitions “on behalf of the peoples of the Third World” that affirmed their identification “intimately and respectfully with their traditions and creative goals.” The most influential statement by an American Jewish intellectual on the old left was I. F. Stone’s article “Holy War,” which appeared in the New York Review of Books in 1967. In this piece, Stone claimed to feel “honor-bound to report the Arab side, especially since the U.S. press is so overwhelmingly pro-Zionist.” Accordingly, Stone bent over backward to implicate the Israelis in creating the Arab refugee crisis. Stone also put down the State of Israel as an expression of “tribalism,” equating those Jews who wanted a state of their own with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, who wanted Spain to be only for the Spanish. On a separate occasion, Stone took up the cudgels on behalf of Black militants, writing that the Jews have it within themselves to counteract a little Black anti-Semitism. “The Jews owe the underprivileged a duty of patience, charity, and compassion. It will not hurt us Jews to swallow a few insults from overwrought Blacks.”

The inclination of Jewish radicals to sympathize with the Black Power movement was perhaps most evident in the large numbers of Jewish New Leftists who refused to reorder their moral and intellectual priorities along the lines suggested by a strong Jewish identification. While Jews never constituted a majority of the New Left rank-and-file, they did account for a disproportionately large number of its leaders. Important founders of Jewish background included Al Haber, Richard Flacks, Steve Marx, Bob Ross, Mike Spiegel, Mike Klonsky, and Mark Rudd. Nearly half of the delegates to the 1966 SDS convention were Jews, and a number of Jews became SDS chapter presidents at major universities, including Columbia, Berkeley, the University of Wisconsin (Madison), Northwestern University, and Michigan University. Jews also made up a significant portion of the movement’s intellectual vanguard. Between 30 and 50 percent of the founders and editorial boards of such New Left journals as Studies on the Left, New University Thought, and Ramparts were of Jewish background. These in-
cluded such prominent New Lefters as Norman Fruchter, Robert Scheer, Saul Landau, Martin Sklar, James Weinstein, David Horowitz, Otto Fein-stein, Ronald Radosh, and Stanley Aronowitz. Philosophers of Jewish birth were also among the most prominent intellectual mentors of the New left and included such figures as Isaac Deutcher, Herbert Marcuse, and Paul Goodman.107

Many analysts struggled to explain the lack of Jewish loyalty among young Jews on the New Left. Some argued that those Jews in the New Left who supported Arab claims in the Six-Day War sprang from the tension created when the permissive, child-centered, idea-oriented environment of their home lives clashed with the rigid rules and regulations of the university. Other analysts continued to emphasize the strong historic Jewish commitment to the left since European emancipation. Still others pointed to the historic phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred, the belief that it is the fault of the Jews that they are disliked.108 The left-wing historian Arthur Liebman has suggested that the young New Left Jews had inherited a tradition of radicalism from their parents and had been immersed in a whole network of socialist-inspired institutions since childhood.109 The sociologist Nathan Glazer supports Liebman's contention, adding that the radical secular tradition was reinforced by the strong emphasis on intellectual activity.110 Of these explanations, Jewish self-hatred was probably the least likely, for most New Left Jews had been raised in leftist homes largely devoid of any positive or negative links to a Jewish community or Jewish thought and need not have rebelled against Judaism or Jewishness to arrive at their positions on Jews and the state of Israel.111

The Jewish New Left and the Rejection of “Whiteness”

All of this is not to say that the approach of the New Left toward the question of the Middle East did not deeply wound many Jews who identified with the New Left. While some Jewish New Leftists abandoned the movement, or renounced their Jewishness and stayed, others decided to form the Jewish Liberation Movement. The Jewish Liberation Movement lasted from roughly 1968 to 1974, a period in which a number of Jewish radical newspapers flourished on campuses and radical Jewish groups were born. “Overall, the Jewish New Left was a loose confederation of many autonomous groups that more or less shared a variety of ideas and interests,” wrote Bill Novak, the editor of the key journal of the Jewish New Left,
Response. The Jewish New Left, or the “New Jews,” essentially concerned itself with the issues of Israel, Soviet Jewry, the “Jewish Establishment,” and Jewish “oppression” in the United States. On Israel, New Jews adamantly defended Israel against the charge of colonialism but openly opposed the Israeli government and favored recognition of Palestinian rights to a sovereign state. To be a Zionist, wrote one radical, “does not mean to support the Israeli government.” As Jack Nusan Porter, an activist and a chronicler of the Jewish New Left, described it, Jewish radicals in the New Left “will take what is good from Blacks and SDSers but will reject what is bad . . . condemn Jewish slumlords, but will support Black Power demands of . . . more jobs, better housing, community control of schools. . . . They will denounce the New Left’s biased account of Zionism yet seek a homeland for the Arab Palestinians.”

But while the New Jews were no doubt sincere, in practice what many of them did was appropriate the prophetic tradition of Judaism to support their radical political agenda. Ignoring the rich Jewish cultural tradition, which consists of various and competing strains of thought, New Left Jewish groups such as the Jewish Liberation Project pronounced that “true commitment to the Jewish tradition necessitates participation in revolutionary struggles.” Perhaps the most notable example of the New Jews’ attempt to use Judaism for radical political purposes was the publication of a document entitled The Freedom Seder, compiled by Arthur Waskow, a Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and one of the leaders of the New Left-inspired National Jewish Organizing Project. In this document, which appeared in the April 1969 issue of Ramparts, Waskow diluted Judaism of its particularity by insisting that while the nationalisms of the Third World were righteous, the Jews must always be universalist. Waskow included in this Passover hagadah passages from “the shofet [judge] Eldridge Cleaver (who went into exile like Moses),” “Prophet Gandhi” and “Prophet Abrahim Johannes Muste,” “Ginsberg the Tzaddik [teacher],” “the Prophet Dylan,” and “Rabbi Hannah Arendt.” When Waskow cited the traditional Seder phrase “This year here, next year in the land of Israel,” he was quick to add, “[W]here there is liberty, that is my country. That is my Israel,” as if to assure the reader, in one critic’s words, “that he is not a Zionist white colonizer preparing to move into the territory of a Third World people.” Waskow himself explained that “the Freedom Seder” was not really about Judaism per se but rather about “multiparticularism”: “Thus [it] is one experimental effort . . . toward what the tradition calls the Passover of the Messianic Age, the Passover of the
liberation of all the nations.” Waskow lent credence to the Black radical attempt to soften the severity of the Holocaust and to detract from its singular quality by comparing it to other, quite different human tragedies and by relegating it to a relatively safe past, the dangers of which could not compare to the more ominous contemporary situation. It was Waskow’s belief that the Jewish tradition impelled Jews to become committed to a radical transformation of the world, because the “modern superstates are preparing a new and much more thorough Holocaust: the destruction of the Jewish people and of the whole human race.”

The Jewish New Left was often incisive in its description of contemporary American life and the cultural price Jews had paid in order to enjoy full participation in it. But the ideological dependency on sustained Jewish oppression drained much of the potency from their otherwise robust Jewish message. Rather than attempt to define possible Jewish alternatives to living an assimilated, middle-class life, the New Jews preferred to continue to define themselves as victims whose greatest responsibility was to assert their brotherhood with the poor, the Black, and the dispossessed. As much as they may have insisted on a muscular Jewish pride, the New Jews refused to relinquish an identity based on the centrality of Jewish persecution.

The New Jews understandably lamented the loss of those elements of Jewishness and Judaism that many believed had been rendered “obsolete” but blamed their loss on capitalist oppression, rather than on democratic freedom. They insisted that, because autonomous Jewish communities would have constituted “indigestible” blocks for the American political system, certain aspects of Jewish culture, particularly the Yiddish language and the observance of the Sabbath, had been wiped out by American cultural and economic pressures. But rather than see these developments as the result of choices made by Jews in an open and dynamic society, the New Jews continued to portray the Jew as a victim, attributing his cultural problems to the “oppressiveness” of American capitalism.

The activists in the Jewish Liberation Movement essentially defied the attempts of Black radicals to label Jews “white,” insisting instead that Jews were still allied with the dark-skinned oppressed. Ironically, the New Jews were able to continue their links with the oppressed masses of Black Americans by utilizing the Black Power definition of “whiteness.” For the Black Power theorists, “whiteness” was a social designation for people who were beneficiaries of European imperialism and its long history of world conquest. In this sense, whiteness became less about skin color than about one’s relationship to power. Who got labeled “white” and who got labeled
“Black” or “nonwhite” had less to do with biology than it did with whether one was a member of a group historically victimized by Western colonialism. By this definition, many New Jews found it easy to categorize themselves as “people of color,” since they had been the primary victims in white Christian societies throughout the ages and, in their own eyes, remained in a state of subjugation in the United States. The New Jews argued that the only way Jews were permitted to enjoy the benefits of white skin privilege in the United States was to renounce their Jewishness. This was their explanation for Jewish assimilation and the break with tradition. It was not unprecedented freedom and opportunity that convinced so many Jews that traditional religious observance was obsolete but rather the continuing threat of anti-Semitism. In this view, Jewish economic success was a mere palliative for the spiritual decimation Jews had experienced. Jews, according to the Jewish Liberation Movement, were not white but rather an oppressed people, kidnapped into a Western world that has never accepted or respected them. As one Jewish New Left writer put it, “[W]hen we come to consider whether Jews in America are oppressed, we should not be side-tracked by the fact that they happen to be economically well off and not subject at the moment to the kind of physical oppression faced by Blacks, Indians, and Chicanos.” The Jewish New Leftist M. Jay Rosenberg called Jews who repudiated their Jewish heritage “Uncle Toms” and claimed that Jewish Uncle Toms did not understand that their “relevance to the Black struggle is as a Jew and a fellow victim of endless white exploitation.”

The idea of the Jew as “middleman” and surrogate oppressor allowed the New Jews to downplay the significance of Black anti-Semitism and sometimes even to defend it. Arthur Waskow explained that the “occasional outbursts of explicit anti-Semitism” from some Blacks scared Jews but that the response should be for the “Jewish grocers and teachers to ally themselves with the Black energies against the social system that had oppressed them all.” Through a radical commitment to revolutionism, Waskow argued, Jews could break out of their “mini-oppressor” roles, which the real oppressors had “slotted us into.” Michael Lerner, a young Jewish activist on the West Coast and a future editor of Tikkun magazine, argued that Black anti-Semitism was not a serious concern because it was rooted in the “concrete fact of oppression by Jews of Blacks in the ghetto.” No matter how inappropriate the response from the Black community, Lerner felt that Black anti-Semitism was nevertheless a disgrace not to Blacks but to Jews. “In short, this anti-Semitism
is in part an earned anti-Semitism," Lerner wrote as he counseled Jews to join the Black anti-Semites in condemning the Jewish exploiters. 125

Other New Jews criticized the Jewish community for not being more understanding of the value of violence to Black Americans. For these Jewish New Leftists, an immoral tactic was seen as occasionally necessary in order to achieve goals, and they likened the use of Black violence to the use of arms by Israelis under Arab attack. “No other alternative is open to the Black man,” wrote Joel Ziff, a student at Columbia College and director of the Harlem Educational Program. “The Jewish community can judge the civil rights movement in the same way it evaluated the Six-Day War; although violence is not desirable, the Israeli use of defensive aggression is justified as the only way to stop Arab persecution.” 126 Arthur Waskow identified with Black rioters in the urban ghettos, comparing the rioters in Washington, D.C., who, in April 1968, had looted stores of appliances and clothes to the children of Israel who had looted gold and jewels upon their escape from Egypt. 127

Perhaps the most important legacy of the Jewish Liberation Movement was the Jewish feminist movement. Jewish women had been at the forefront of the women’s movement in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, but not until the early 1970s had they begun to participate in the movement consciously as Jews. While the Jewish feminist movement and its confrontation with Black feminists would not peak until the mid-1980s, the movement itself got off the ground during the late 1960s and early 1970s with the appearance of the first group of articles on Jewish feminism in a special issue of Davka magazine, the creation of Jewish feminist groups like Kol Ishah and Ezrat Nashim, and the appearance of Jewish feminists before the Rabbinical Assembly convention. 128 This activity was followed by a special issue on Jewish feminism in the radical feminist periodical Off Our Backs and an anthology of writings from the Jewish women’s movement that appeared in Response magazine in 1973 and that was later published in book form. 129 Like their mostly male counterparts among the New Jews, the women in the Jewish feminist movement included talented scholars and writers who were working toward a reconstruction of the role of Jewish women within Jewish theology and Jewish organizational life. Writers like Blu Greenberg, Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, Rachel Adler, Judith Plasskow, Arlene Agus, Susan Dworkin, and Paula Hyman wrote incisively about Jewish law, history, and politics in an effort to bring the position of women in Judaism and in the Jewish community in line with modern ideas about gender equality. 130 Nevertheless, like the bulk of the writers in the
Jewish Liberation Movement, the most vocal elements of the Jewish feminist movement had been prodded into thinking more deeply about their Jewishness by Black radicalism, this time in the form of the identity politics of Black feminists, which, in attempting to strengthen linkages with feminists of the Third World, tended to define Jewish women outside the circle of the oppressed. The Jewish lesbian feminist Elly Bulkin has testified that much “as the women’s movement of the late sixties and early seventies had its roots in the earlier civil rights struggle and the New Left ... the increasing number of women who define ourselves as Jewish feminists ... owe a significant debt as well to the emergence ... of a broad-based Third World feminist movement in this country.”¹³¹ As a result, the Jewishness of many Jewish feminists amounted to a fierce defense of their oppressed status both as Jews and as women, deferring, as most Jewish New Leftists did, to the idea that Jews in general and Jewish women in particular continue to be the targets of widespread discrimination and bigotry. Elly Bulkin has written that “Jewishness is not, as many assume, equivalent to whiteness. Racism is a significant problem among [sic] Jews.” Accordingly, Bulkin attributed the growth of “Jewish feminist consciousness in the past few years ... to a significant upsurge in anti-Jewish acts in the United States and in other parts of the world.”¹³²

Like the New Jews, many Jewish feminists were ambivalent about Zionism and the State of Israel, the majority of them supporting a homeland for Jews but having tremendous misgivings about Israeli policies toward Palestinian Arabs.¹³³ Even the most pro-Zionist feminists often justified their support for Israel in terms of recompense for Jewish suffering and in this way linked their Zionism to the Black struggle for equality. The prominent Jewish feminist Letty Cotton Pogrebin has written in this regard that, to her, “Zionism is simply an affirmative action plan on a national scale” justified by the “intransigence of worldwide anti-Semitism.”¹³⁴

After much struggle, many Jewish feminists finally came to rest on an identity defined almost solely by the Jewish relationship to oppression. “White Jews in this society are oppressed as Jews, yet privileged as people with white skin,” writes Elly Bulkin.¹³⁵ For radical Jewish feminists like Evelyn Torton Beck, Jewish “success” in the United States and elsewhere has always been tenuous and tainted by the larger purpose of Jewish exploitation. “The great American dream, ‘from rags to riches,’ ” writes Beck, “is simply not acceptable to Jews ... it is only because some groups have ‘allowed’ it: often ... with the purpose of using Jews as a buffer and/or as an easy scapegoat when one is needed.”¹³⁶
The Jewish New Leftists set the standard for the mainstream Jewish response to Black Power, arguing vehemently that American Jews were still among the oppressed and that their place was still alongside Black Americans. In this, Jewish New Leftists had taken Jewish suffering, the most readily available and usable form of Jewish identity, and made it the defining element in their program. In the mind of Jewish New Leftists, Jews were nonwhite; Black anti-Semitism was antiwhite and therefore not anti-Jewish; the expression of Black Power was identical to the expression of Jewishness and Judaism in its various forms, including Zionism; and Jews were not only playing the role of white oppressors but in fact were abandoning their links to Jewish tradition by not aligning themselves with Black Power. But while Jewish New Leftists prided themselves on a radical approach to Jewish identity, their lead was in fact being followed closely by mainstream liberal Jewish leaders and intellectuals who often shared the New Jews' basic assumptions about Jewish identity and its link to Black Americans.

Liberal Jews and Black Power

Despite the New Left's critique of the Jewish establishment, many establishment figures adhered largely to the New Left's radical interpretation of events as they pertained to race relations and the place of Jews in the United States. That is, a vast majority of Jewish leaders and spokespersons, struggling to deal with the shock of persistent anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric coming from the precincts of their historic Black allies, continued to cling, sometimes desperately, to a Jewish identity based on active involvement in Black causes and civil rights. Most of these leaders subscribed to the notion that Black anti-Semitism was negligible or "understandable" given the "uneven" relationship in which the members of both groups were engaged and that Jews themselves continued to be the natural allies of Black Americans because they were, in some ways, still the victims of white Christian discrimination and not fully of the privileged "white" majority. Evidence of these attitudes abounds from the late 1960s.

Major national Jewish organizations and prominent Jewish leaders contributed to a virtual cascade of voices seeking to strengthen Jewish commitment to the Black revolution. The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council issued a statement in 1967 on race relations, saying that "for the Jewish community to be deflected from its support and ad-
vocacy of equality for Negroes on the ground that Negroes are anti-Semitic would not only be self-defeating, exacerbating precisely what we mean to combat; but would be to repudiate a fundamental tenet of Jewish tradition—equal justice for all.” 137 Arthur J. Goldberg, a former Supreme Court Justice and the newly elected president of the American Jewish Committee, at the annual meeting of the Executive Board in 1968 urged that Jews continue to aid Blacks to achieve full equality. “The great body of Negroes,” Goldberg said, “do not share the opinion of the few extremists within our own community, and Jews should not be deterred from their obligation to combat bigotry against any minority.” Rabbi Walter Wurzberger, the editor of the modern orthodox quarterly Tradition, concurred: “Irrespective of all short-term considerations of expediency or enlightened self-interest, we must be guided by our religious tradition which regards involvement with social and economic concerns of all men as a religious imperative.” 138 Martin Jelin, the president of the New Jersey area American Jewish Committee, told the New Jersey State Conference that “no matter how trying Jews find Black extremist reaction, we must not forget our relations to Blacks, our feeling of brotherhood and our common destiny.” The conference itself adopted a resolution stating that “we must reject the temptation to get out of the struggle for social justice because some elements have resorted to intolerable tactics.” 139 Paul Davidoff, chairman of the American Jewish Congress Special Task Force on Negro-Jewish Relations, declared in a speech in 1969 that “Negro anti-Semitism poses little, if any, threat to Jewish institutions or to the survival of the Jewish people. Jews must temper their reaction to the rhetoric of Black Power with this knowledge.” 140 Rabbi Harry Halpern, the chairman of the Joint Commission on Social Action of the Conservative movement’s United Synagogues of America, wrote that “anti-Jewishness is not an integral part of the Black man’s struggle for freedom, identity, and self-determination” and that “Jews must not withhold the support which they have given, in the past, to help the Negro in his desperate battle for real, as opposed to alleged, emancipation.” To do so would be “to betray our heritage and the basic principles of our faith.” 141 Henry Schwarzchild, a refugee from Nazi Germany, a fellow at the Metropolitan Applied Research Center, and a member of the Commission on Religion and Race of the Conservative movement’s Synagogue Council of America, claimed to be appalled by the anti-Semitism he saw in such events as the New Politics Convention in Chicago in 1967. Nevertheless, in his “Jewish judgement,” this kind of anti-Semitism should not deter Jews from helping Blacks because the suf-
ferring of Black Americans had given them an inexhaustible reservoir of moral credit upon which to draw. During the New York City school strike in 1968, Schwarzchild criticized the Anti-Defamation League report that declared that anti-Semitism was at a "crisis level" because it only diverted energies from the more important civil rights struggle.

In general, Jewish leaders who were concerned that the Jewish community and Judaism remain "involved" in the race revolution and "relevant" to the problems of the inner city excoriated those Jews and Jewish congregations that they believed had abandoned the inner-city ghettos by retreating to the sanctuary of the suburbs. Rabbi Balfour Brickner of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations minced no words: "Too many Jews have removed themselves and their organizations from the inner city even while talking about the need to respond to the urban crisis. This makes us irrelevant to the struggle to rebuild the cities." Harry Fleischman, race relations coordinator for the American Jewish Committee, turned the attack against American Jews, denying that there was a higher level of anti-Semitism in the Black community than among white Christians and insisting that almost every instance of Black anti-Semitism had been repudiated by responsible Black leaders.

With the specter of growing Black anti-Semitism all but undeniable, it took considerable effort on the part of Jewish leaders to continue to down-play its significance. One document that Jewish leaders and intellectuals found helpful was the Anti-Defamation League-sponsored study by Gary T. Marx titled Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community, published in 1967. The study was prompted by the inner-city riots that took place in New York and in other cities in 1964 and focused on measuring the climate of opinion in the Black community regarding the civil rights movement. Marx surveyed more than a thousand Black adults in the North and South in October 1964 and from his index of prejudice concluded that Black Americans were essentially moderate and rejected the extremism of certain Black nationalist movements. On the matter of anti-Semitism, Marx concluded that Blacks were no more prejudiced than whites and that, in fact, they were probably less anti-Semitic by most measures. Marx did find, however, that Blacks tended to have more "economically based anti-Semitism" than whites, a consequence, Marx believed, of frequent Black-Jewish economic interaction. Marx concluded that, "while African American anti-Semitism is deplorable, it certainly is more understandable than white anti-Semitism."

Marx's study came under heavy criticism from other social scientists for
relying solely on survey data and for letting his own personal bias toward the Black struggle for equality impinge on his methods of data collection. Perhaps the most serious problem with the study was its limited inclusion of young Blacks and college-educated Blacks among those surveyed, which significantly reduced its power to predict how Black attitudes might evolve after 1964, the year the interviews were completed. Only 13 percent of Marx’s respondents had some college education; only 22 percent were eighteen to twenty-nine years old. During the three years between the time the research was conducted and the book’s publication, a number of significant events occurred that appear to have thrown the study’s validity into serious doubt: the assassination of Malcolm X; the Watts riot; and the birth of Black Power, to name only a few. The increased alienation of Black Americans ages sixteen through twenty-five was captured in a study by *Fortune* magazine that found that nearly twice as many Blacks from that age group rejected integration as a primary objective compared to their elders. Martin Duberman, a Princeton University historian, wrote in a 1968 review of the Marx study that the “question which then arises is whether a significant shift in Negro attitudes had taken place in the past year—that is, since Marx’s book went to press.” By most indications, it had.

Nevertheless, many Jewish leaders and intellectuals used the Marx study to bolster their belief that Black anti-Semitism was not a major threat and that therefore the proper Jewish response would be to redouble efforts on behalf of Black Americans. Dore Schary, a leader of the Anti-Defamation League, condemned the Black extremism that he had witnessed in 1967 but cited the Marx study as evidence that Blacks were not inordinately prejudiced against Jews. Schary analyzed the results of the National Conference on New Politics in Chicago at which “the imperialist Zionist war” was condemned and at which the concept of racial separation was adopted as a goal, writing that the “Black demagogues” who ran the convention were “racist revolutionaries who hold nothing but contempt for the whole civil rights movement.” In “utter dismay,” Schary read SNCC’s June/July newsletter, which contained attacks on Israel and Jews, and condemned SNCC for “parroting the vicious anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish diatribes of Arab and Soviet propagandists.” Nevertheless, Schary paraphrased the Marx study on Black anti-Semitism. “To the degree that they [Blacks] distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish whites, *they prefer Jews.*” Schary suggested that Jews should “get the message” the Black extremists were sending and recommit themselves to the alleviation of Black grievances.
In a long pamphlet issued by the Reform movement’s Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1968, Rabbi Henry Cohen set out to define a “Jewish view of the Negro revolt.” At its deepest religious core, Rabbi Cohen wrote, Judaism demanded that Jews pursue justice for all human beings, Jews and non-Jews alike, and this injunction had nothing to do with the response Jews got from those their efforts benefit. Cohen took a rather benign view of Black Power, arguing that only SNCC had taken the separatist element of Black Power very seriously and that most established Black leaders maintained their vision of “Black and white together.” In order to validate this contention, Cohen used Gary Marx’s study, claiming that “the overwhelming majority of American Negroes reject the varieties of Black Nationalism and accept the coalition and integration strategies of the older leadership.” The Jewish response to Black anti-Semitism, according to Cohen, should be one of understanding and “sometimes asking ourselves how much we should give up for the sake of our neighbor.”

Cohen and Schary were by no means alone in their sentiments. In a speech to the World Jewish Congress in 1967, Chief Judge Gus J. Solomon of the United States District Court in Oregon reiterated Cohen’s views, saying that although many of the Black extremists had become racist and anti-Semitic, he was convinced “that the conclusions of the Anti-Defamation League studies which showed less antagonism by African-Americans against Jews than against every other group of whites are accurate” and that Jews and others need to continue to extend help to the Black community.

By superimposing the attitudes of older and less educated Blacks from the early 1960s onto the radicalized racial scene of the late 1960s, the Marx study seemed to complement a widespread effort among Jewish community relations professionals to hang on to the vestiges of the integrated civil rights movement. The urgent call of many Jewish leaders to remain involved in the Black struggle, combined with their call to understand Black Power, often made for an awkward mixture, with Jewish leaders espousing praise for Black Power and the virtues of Black self-help, while at the same time calling for greater Jewish involvement in Black affairs. This reflected a total disregard for the meaning and implications of Black Power and a commensurate rejection of the very idea of an autonomous Jewish community with independent purpose.

The case of Bertram Gold, the executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, provides perhaps the most glaring example of a Jewish
communal leader who stated his support for the Black Power objectives of self-help and group pride, only to recommend more Jewish commitment to the Black struggle, even to the extent of diverting communal resources from internal Jewish needs. In an address to the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service in 1968, Gold warned Jews not to build a mythology about Black militants and revealed his hopes that Jews would be able to carry on as allies of Blacks. “All Black militants are not alike,” Gold wrote. “Not all Black militants reject alliance with whites. Not all Black militants are anti-Semitic. We have to devise strategies—and some of us are doing just that—for keeping lines of communication with these forces open.” It was Gold’s belief that Jewish communal agencies were too “inward” looking, and, surprisingly, that relations with other groups of Americans deserved a portion of Jewish communal resources equal to that reserved for Jewish education. The Jewish community system must enter what Gold believed was a new phase that “will recognize that the Jewish community system and the general community system are interdependent, and that along with the increasing attention we are giving to Jewish knowledge we must also give increasing attention to making our own tradition relevant to today’s society.”

Obviously, in calling for an equal distribution of resources to both Jewish education and the race revolution, Gold revealed that he did not consider the problem of religious ignorance among Jews or the related problem of Jewish continuity in the United States to be particularly urgent. But Gold did not even perceive that his recommendations were antithetical to the objectives of Black Power. Despite declaring that Black Power desired temporary separation most of all, one of the most important objectives Gold outlined was for Jews to help Blacks create Black welfare federations and to extend themselves in every way possible where integration had a chance. For Gold, apparently, Black separation was acceptable, but only for rhetorical purposes, while Jewish separation and internal Jewish development was not a high priority at all. “The Jewish community,” Gold concluded, “will not meet this challenge by leaving the larger struggle in a new isolation that would have us concentrate only on programs of narrowly defined Jewish concern.”

In playing down the bad in Black Power and emphasizing the positive, some Jewish leaders expressed the belief that Black Power would help create an atmosphere more conducive to true diversity and hence a United States in which American Jewish life could flourish in much greater freedom. But stating this required that these Jews ignore the paradox of Black
Power pluralism, which emphasized social divisions based on race and submerged the differences among white ethnic groups beneath the banner of "white skin privilege." Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary believed that Black Power represented a real opportunity for American Jews and that dropping out of the Black struggle represented a betrayal of Jewish self-interest. Schorsch thought that ultimately Jews would gain from Jewish community. The solution meant "an intoxication with shaping a Jewish self-interest." Schorsch thought that ultimately Jews would gain from logical scars from which they had suffered as the price for emancipation.

"The price we paid was the agreement not to identify ourselves publicly as Jews, to suppress every public display of Jewishness. . . . The victory of the Black revolution can only aid in strengthening our own identification with the Jewish community." Albert Vorspan, director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, also believed that Black Power would result in real benefits for Jews. "The drive for Black Power is, ideally, opening America to a new and true pluralism in which Jews will be one of the important beneficiary groups." For Vorspan, the problem with Judaism in America was not that it needed redefinition from within but that it was not concerned enough with crises and events outside of the Jewish community. The solution meant "an intoxication with shaping a better world." Vorspan, like many of the others, advocated Black Power as good for Jewish autonomy, but he could not break from the liberal consensus that the first priority of Jews must be the affairs of the Black community.

All of which brings us to the work of Dr. Leonard Fein, a well-known scholar and a consultant to a number of national Jewish communal agencies, who emerged in the late 1960s as the foremost liberal spokesman on Black-Jewish relations. It is interesting to analyze Fein's position on the issue of Black Power because he has been a particularly creative and articulate proponent of Jewish continuity in the United States, and one who has convincingly argued that a Jewish preoccupation with anti-Semitism has been a primary obstacle to the development and sustenance of Jewish life and culture. But Fein's approach to Black Power and Black anti-Semitism reveals that he himself was not free from reliance on Jewish victimization for his formulation of identity.

Fein saw Black Power as a reasonable response to the failure of integration, one that was fully within the historical patterns of American pluralism and a way by which the Black community could organize to gain its due, "not unlike the creation of the labor movement fifty years ago." Ignoring the historical examples of white Protestants and Jews, two of the most
successful yet disunited and individualistic American ethnic groups, Fein energetically defended the integrity of the pluralistic assumptions behind Black Power.\footnote{159} Black Power, wrote Fein, is a recognition of what every other ethnic group in America knows: “The way to move ahead in this society is to organize, to move together as a group.”\footnote{160} Nevertheless, he apparently did not take the objectives and principles of Black Power seriously and, consequently, recommended a path for whites that ran along lines antithetical to those principles: “The first is to do what we have never done before, to fulfill the promise of integration.” Accordingly, Fein disregarded the Black Power preference for community control of school districts and suggested an “immediate metropolitanization of our school system, even if such a step were to involve some qualitative sacrifice in the educational excellence of white suburban schools.”\footnote{161} Fein confessed that the messages of Black Power were confusing to him, but his own vision of Black Power, compatible with an effort at massive integration, seemed more a reflection of his preference for continuing a Black-Jewish alliance than an objective appraisal of Black demands.

Fein’s position suffered from a serious inconsistency, in which the pluralist potential of Black Power was exalted but the Black Power insistence on the “whiteness” and similarity of all white ethnic groups was ignored. “If, therefore, it [Black Power] succeeds, we ourselves [Jews] will be among its unintended beneficiaries,” Fein wrote.\footnote{162} But Black Power militants were not interested so much in cultural diversity and ethnic tolerance as they were in gaining power by using the political advantages accruing to the victims of white racism. Because of this limited view of American pluralism, anti-Semitism, if not inextricably linked to Black Power, may have been a necessary correlate because of the ambiguous status of Jews, at least in the Jewish psyche, vis-à-vis power and discrimination. Fein himself acknowledged this difficulty with Black Power, but instead of addressing it he set out to find a place for Jews in America’s new pluralistic universe as something other than white, a position that would and did find much opposition within the ranks of Black Power. The word “Black,” which the Black Power advocates preferred to “Negro,” was unsettling for Fein because it implied an inaccurate Black-white racial dichotomy that Jews seemed to straddle. “The fact of the matter is,” wrote Fein, “that Jews, however much we have accumulated the trappings of American success, are not white. We are not white symbolically, and we are not white literally. . . . We are too much an oppressed people, still, and too much a
rejected people, even in this country, to accept the designation ‘white.’” Fein admitted that Jews were not exactly “Black,” but he believed they possessed a special racial status that would serve as the key to a viable Jewish future in the United States. The Jews must see to it that as a community they do not act as whites, Fein wrote, “not only because we of all people ought to know better, but because we shall cut ourselves off from our own future if we do.”

Long one of the most thoughtful intellectuals on the Jewish scene, Fein had been among the first to attest to the distraction that a preoccupation with anti-Semitism has been for those trying to lead an affirmative Jewish life. It was no surprise, then, that when it became almost impossible to deny the significance of Black anti-Semitism, Fein did not attempt to dismiss it but, instead, refused to deal with it. As late as 1969, Fein argued that Jews ought not to invest great attention in the matter of Black anti-Semitism, “not because Black people need to be indulged, nor because we need to be slapped in the face, but quite simply and quite plainly because we have more serious matters to attend to.” By the time of the major Black-Jewish altercations of the late 1960s, Fein believed that an opportunity for a new Jewish awakening had been averted by “hysterical overreaction,” which served to divert communal energies into defensive patterns that were both familiar and unproductive. “It is . . . as if we need anti-Semites, need to be confronted by others, lest we be forced to confront ourselves.” In an interview with Time magazine for a major cover story on the “crisis” between Blacks and Jews, Fein said that some Jews had responded to Black anti-Semitism in a slightly paranoid manner and that “Jews in a perverse kind of way need anti-Semites. Jews in this country are in fairly serious trouble spiritually and ideologically, and it is very comforting to come once again to an old and familiar problem.”

But Fein did not consider that the identification of Jews with Blacks, embodied in his own insistence that Jews were not white, derived from the same dependency on anti-Semitism that Fein had identified as Jewish paranoia. In his eloquent 1988 book, Where Are We: The Inner Life of America’s Jews, Fein argued that Jews should not give up on the alliance with Blacks, “for it has helped preserve our sense of ourselves as still, and in spite of all the successes we’ve known, among the oppressed. . . . The alliance was born not only out of our empathy for Black misery, but also out of our continuing need to see ourselves among the miserable—or, at least, the still-threatened.” Apparently, Fein had not noticed that to view
Jewish leaders were conspicuous for the frequency with which they compared Black Power with Zionism, often without the slightest sensitivity to the differences between the two nationalist impulses in both theory and practice, or to their vastly different implications for Jewish life in the United States. Some Jewish leaders, in particular those associated with the Reconstructionist arm of Judaism, were of the belief that Black Power was the equivalent of Black Zionism, or even of Black Judaism, and they claimed to see virtually no difference between the two. Reconstructionist Jews were particularly enamored of this view because they were part of a movement that believed in the idea of continuously "reconstructed" sancta that function as phenomena in the ongoing life of a people. Rabbi Allan Miller of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City, the "mother" synagogue of the Reconstructionist movement, believed that, through the Black Power movement, Black Americans were forming their own religion, a religion that was in its most fundamental presuppositions the equivalent of Judaism. "A Black religion is being born in the search of the Black man for an authentic identity. He cannot find it in American civilization alone. . . . If he succeeds in this struggle, America is safer for the Jew as well as for the Black man." The Black Power urge to have independently controlled institutions was entirely understandable, Miller wrote, when seen as part of a genuine religious drive.

To substantiate his belief in the efficacy of this emerging Black religion, Miller equated the attempt to develop Swahili as an ethnic linguistic sanctum with the development of modern Hebrew vernacular by Zionists and the creation of "religious" holidays celebrating important dates in the Black Power movement with Jewish holidays. "Uhuru" or freedom, the anniversary of the Watts riot, was the Black Passover. Kuzaliwa, the birthday of Malcolm X, was for many Black public school students the equivalent of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashana) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) for Jewish students. The Black "bible," Miller argued, was emerging in which the works of men like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and others that would be "canonized." Ignoring the
vast difficulties of Black repatriation, Miller even envisioned Black equivalents to the early Jewish settlers in Palestine in Africa. “There must even now be an Afro-American Henrietta Szold, conceiving a functionally equivalent Hadassah organization” in Africa, Miller wrote. As for Black moderates who had been accused of not speaking out forcefully enough against extremists, Miller saw a parallel in the Zionist movement. Miller asked Jewish readers if they had forgotten the Stern Gang, the terrorist wing of the Jewish underground in Palestine. Neglecting to mention the cooperation Jewish authorities in Palestine gave to the British in tracking down Sternists, Miller asked, “Did any single member of the Yishuv, the Jewish community of Palestine under the mandate . . . ever betray a single one of those terrorists or publicly disown him?”

Another writer for the Reconstructionist, Dov Peretz Elkins, could see no distinction between Black Power and Zionism. “Black Power is nothing more and nothing less than Negro Zionism,” he wrote. Just as Zionism meant for Elkins Jewish group unity, the constructive use of Jewish economic and political power, and the giving of full expression to Jewish ethnic pride, Jews should support the efforts to foster a feeling among Blacks that “Black is beautiful.” Apparently, Elkins saw no conflict between his hope for the development of Black Power and Black pride and his paternalistic feelings toward Blacks. “If we sincerely wish to integrate our society, we must do so even if it involves, on a temporary basis, a little extra help for the Negro than the white child or the white worker may receive.”

Other Jewish writers shared the sentiments of Elkins and Miller. Bertram Gold of the American Jewish Committee defined the meaning of the terms Black Power and Zionism as the “facilitation and empowerment” of both peoples “to be and become themselves.” “As one reads the growing Black Power literature . . . one is reminded of Chaim Zhitlowsky’s writings on Jewish Nationalism, Ahad Ha’am’s emphasis on spiritual Zionism, the many articles on Jewish self-hate and the like.” Barbara Krasner, codirector of Wellsprings Ecumenical Renewal Associates in Philadelphia and a writer for Jewish publications, also believed that Zionism and Black Power were so similar that there were no significant distinctions to be made. “It is reasonably apparent,” she wrote, “that the struggle for the Land of Israel . . . and the struggle for Black Power are one and the same, territory notwithstanding.”

In truth, the approach of most Jews, and especially American Jews, toward Zionism had always been far different from the Black American ap-
proach to Black nationalism, if for no other reason than the differences in the historical circumstances that gave birth to the two movements. When these differences are taken into account, it is possible to see that nationalist impulses find expression in a variety of ways, some of which make it possible for liberal values to survive and flourish and some of which facilitate the stifling and the suppression of liberal values.

It is true that the surface similarities between Black nationalism and Zionism make it difficult to distinguish between them. The three major expressions of modern Zionism consisted of the return to the historic homeland of the Jewish people, the land of Israel; “territorialism,” which argued for the importance of a Jewish state anywhere; and the “autonomism” of such Zionists as Simon Dubnow, who thought that Jews should work to control their own lives in communities where they predominated. All three of these nationalist forms were present in the Black nationalist movement, from Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement, to the Black Muslims who spoke of a separate “land of our own” in the United States, to Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, who argued for Black control of local Black institutions. But it is in the sphere of practical politics, rather than in theory, that Black nationalism and Zionism become clearly distinct from each other.

The magnitude of the Jewish diaspora made the quest for a Jewish state distinct in the process of its realization, and it has been perhaps the only successful modern nationalist movement based on the idea of return. The focus on “return” and in-migration gave political Zionism a unique coloration. The goal of achieving emigration to Palestine at all costs, of “in-gathering” the Jews from around the world, provided Zionism with an opportunity to escape, in part, the more common and immediate nationalist goal of political sovereignty, which is often accompanied by chauvinism and extremism.

The Zionist scholar Ben Halpern has explained that Zionism was unique among nationalisms because at most points in its history, political sovereignty was subordinated to other national goals. It was true, of course, that there were Zionists who believed that political sovereignty in the land of Israel was the primary national aim. But political sovereignty had as a practical matter been relegated to a secondary concern for most of the existence of organized Zionism. This is a fact corroborated by the character of the debate that dominated the history of modern Zionism. At every turn, the debate revolved around the issue of migration and took place primarily between those Zionists who preferred to wait for Great Britain
to secure Jewish emigration to Palestine and those who were working to achieve emigration by other methods. Even the Revisionist Zionists under Vladimir Jabotinsky, the one segment of the movement that openly favored an autonomous state as the end goal, did not view the sovereign Jewish state as a precondition for achieving national aims but believed that such a political entity would come sometime in the future as a crowning achievement. Jabotinsky's search for an alliance with an existing sovereign state as a prerequisite for evacuating Jews to Palestine is evidence of his willingness to discard sovereignty for more practical aims. "Thus, on occasion, the most extreme political Zionists could modify or mitigate their demands of sovereignty, or subordinate the exercise of sovereignty to other national aims which at the moment seemed more pressing," wrote Halpern.¹⁷⁸

Eventually, Hitler's war against the Jews and the 1939 British White Paper prohibiting Jewish migration to Palestine resulted in the adoption of the "Biltmore" program of 1942, in which Zionists asked that an area called "Palestine" be established as a Jewish commonwealth. But up until the 1940s, a "Jewish state" was not Zionism's primary aim. While Theodore Herzl proclaimed the Jewish state a world necessity, he and his successors mentioned the state only infrequently for lack of a clear strategy for bringing it about. Most other Zionist leaders believed that at some time in the future Palestine would eventually become Jewish, not by war but through emigration. A survey of the Zionist press in the decade prior to the Biltmore conference indicated that the term "Jewish state" had almost disappeared from common usage.¹⁷⁹ "It took the advent of Nazism, the Holocaust and total Arab rejection of the national home to convert the Zionist movement to the belief in statehood," wrote the historian Walter Laqueur.¹⁸⁰ The most recent and comprehensive scholarly analysis of the connection between the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel demonstrates that the Holocaust revolutionized the Jewish political mind.¹⁸¹

Even after 1942, when news of the Holocaust became known, the ideal of a more substantial and secure sovereignty rested on the achievement of the goal of mass migration, and Israel's formal sovereignty made this larger goal finally possible. Vladimir Jabotinsky and the Revisionists were virtually alone before 1930 in preaching the idea that a state was a normal form of existence for Jews.

That Zionism was infused with a goal that was distinct from the goal of political sovereignty became important for its subsequent development, because it permitted the state of Israel to engage in an unusually high degree of self-criticism, while at the same time enabling it to avoid being domi-
nated by the extreme patriotic chauvinism associated with some Zionist sects. The well-known Jewish critic Robert Alter has explained that Zionism's distinctiveness relative to other nationalisms derived from its objectivity toward the concept of sovereignty. At the heart of modern Zionism lay the goal of saving Jewish lives, Alter argued, and this allowed Zionism to be "ideologically reasonable," to escape the "self-hypnotizing fanaticism of many national movements" because it was not born of the rebellion of an indigenous people against foreign rulers. Zionism managed to avoid being dominated by its nationalistic messianic claims because it was linked to at least one practical moral purpose: "the unwavering obligation it preserves to provide a place of refuge for any Jews in the world who need refuge." In short, historical exigencies made it possible for Zionists to be nationalistic while maintaining a "critical disengagement from the old potent Zionist myths."

The development of Black nationalism was quite another story. In the first place, Black nationalism did not have a geographical focus. The link to the land of origin was not as firmly ensconced in Black American consciousness as it was for the East European Jew, who prayed daily for the return of his people to their land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. For Black Americans in the 1960s, the existence of numerous independent African nation-states must have dampened the impulse to create a state of their own, and the lack of a geographical focal point made the idea that Black Americans constituted a colonized people difficult to develop. Black nationalists from Malcolm X to Stokely Carmichael to the Black Panthers to Julius Lester all fought with but ultimately failed to deal satisfactorily with the issue of land, leading one contemporary theorist to suggest that the Black ghetto is really only a "semi-colony."

And so Black nationalism was destined to remain enclosed within the borders of the United States, and it was precisely this predicament that rendered it unique in its own right. The alternatives available within the United States for realizing the Black nationalist goal of self-determination were far different from those that faced the Zionists, and they led inevitably to an emphasis on Black political and cultural sovereignty in almost exactly opposite proportions to the Zionist emphasis on rescue and migration. "Black Power must be viewed as a projection of sovereignty, an embryonic sovereignty that Black people can focus on and through," commented the Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver. "The necessity upon Afro-Americans is to move, now . . . to demand that that sovereignty be recognized by other nations of the world." The emphasis on sovereignty in Black nationalism
was a necessity because the institution of slavery had precluded the continuation of "cultural narratives" that allow a group to develop values and standards not necessarily shared by the majority culture. A number of scholars over the years have pointed out the existence of various "Afrikanisms" that carried over into the culture of Black Americans, as well as the existence of unique cultural traits growing out of the slave system itself.

A rich oral tradition (story telling) and a tradition of rhythm in dance and song are among the most prominent cultural traits that are said to have survived the midway passage. But by 1750, more American slaves had been born in the United States than had been born in Africa, and by 1860 virtually all slaves had been born in the United States. While some second-, third-, and fourth-generation slaves undoubtedly carried various cultural imprimaturs from Africa, Black slaves in America lacked the freedom that could anchor a complete culture. Unlike the slaves in the Caribbean or South America, most slaves in the United States lived on family-owned plantations of between ten and twenty slaves where such staples of African culture as conjuring, witchcraft, and voodoo stood no chance of surviving. The sheer diversity of the African tribes and cultures from which the slaves themselves came made the preservation of ancestral languages an impossibility. The majority of slaves eventually adopted both the language and the religion of their masters, though not without applying significant doses of African cultural residue to both realms. That is to say, despite the long recorded history of slave rebellions, slaves in the United States, finding themselves outnumbered and outgunned, were left with no choice but to internalize the norms of the institution of slavery and to cooperate in their own subordination. The adoption of Christianity by the overwhelming majority of slaves is only one indication of this cultural adaptation. As Laurence Thomas has written, "Given the character of slavery, it is thus most unlikely that the historical-cultural traditions of Africa would come to have a secure foothold among slaves in the United States."

For better or worst, under slavery Blacks became an integral and permanent part of American life, and this fact has proven to be the greatest obstacle to the development of Black cultural and political autonomy. In large measure, the primary goal of Black nationalism, from the time of its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day, has been an attempt to gain autonomy, or "sovereignty," over the Black past and the Black present. As Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton have written, "Our basic need is to reclaim our history and our identity. . . . We
shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves. . . . This is the first necessity of a free people.” 196

Herein lies the paradox for American Blacks. Having been systematically excluded from enjoying the self-affirming aspects of American culture to the fullest, they have also always carried out large and important roles in that culture and have therefore experienced great difficulty in establishing a set of countervailing cultural values separate and distinct from those of the broader “white” culture. Having been alienated from the cultural narrative of Africa and having been historically excluded from the rites and rituals of the United States, Black Americans continue to see their only alternative as to define themselves as both distinct from and yet necessarily a part of the United States. Lacking the single most important trait of a fully developed nationalism—namely, the realistic possibility of striving for a separate state—Black nationalists are left only with the possibility of gaining entry into American life on their own terms. As the sociologist James Blaut has written, “The demand for self-determination which is constantly voiced in ghettos is a demand for enfranchisement and people’s power, not for independence.” 197 This precarious psychological situation has made it necessary to define Black American distinctiveness in opposition to the white majority in the United States, based on their historic exclusion from it. But the Black nationalism of the late 1960s came of age at a time when the historic exclusion of Black Americans from the rest of society was being substantially and consistently reduced, necessitating a more intense and strident call for Black cultural distinctiveness, the foundation for which was the sanctification of white racism. In other words, the success of Black Power was contingent upon the continued racialization of American life.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act stood as the crowning achievements of the effort to provide greater equality for Black Americans, but at the same time they made continued injustices more intolerable and calls for communal autonomy more intense. Lacking both an event as horrific as the Holocaust to trigger a permanent break with America and an attachment to an ancestral homeland, Black Power advocates set as their primary goal the consolidation of political power through racial unity in order to build and strengthen the Black community. As one Black critic wrote, “The key fact remains . . . that radical Black consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s was largely a discourse about intersecting with public power. . . . Even Pan-Africanists and cultural nationalists, whose ideologies supported quietistic withdrawal from American politics, consistently sought to align themselves with Black public officials . . .
and to mobilize around contesting the exercise of public authority in the Black community." 

Because Blacks are such an integral part of American society, the fight of Black nationalists within the system, and the changes they sought, ended up changing the whole of American life. "Their fight within the system to be freed from it always requires taking the whole system with them to their destination," another Black critic has written. 

And change American life it did. Beginning in 1964, the ghetto riots were seen by the Black Power leadership not merely as an expression of need and deprivation but as an opportunity to link a stratum of Black leadership to a large mass following, something that had not been available to previous generations of Black elites. This situation resulted in the emergence of what one scholar has called the "paraintellectual" in the Black community—generally lower-class, self-made intellectuals skilled at verbal combat and possessed of a facility for confrontation that make them "cultural celebrities" in ghetto communities. Eventually, every American city with a sizable Black population sported such a stratum of leaders. Guido St. Laurent of Boston, the founder and leader of the New England Grass Roots organization, and Eldridge Cleaver in San Francisco, a writer and leader of the Black Panther Party, were two paraintellectuals whose careers were typical of the cohort, both having spent time in jail for past criminal activities. 

As the so-called "natural" leaders of their communities, the paraintellectuals came to control the terms upon which legitimacy in the urban Black community was defined, and it became exceedingly difficult for the established Black intelligentsia to ignore these terms. It was for this reason that Roy Innis of Brooklyn CORE said in the late 1960s that "a Black leader would be crazy to publicly repudiate Black anti-Semitism." Of course, moderate Black leaders had spoken out against Black anti-Semitism on the national level frequently, but doing so became increasingly difficult for them, and almost impossible for Black leaders at the local level. Blackness in the United States in the 1960s was being transformed from a purely racial to a largely ideological category, in which militancy became the sole criterion by which legitimacy would be conferred upon Black leaders. In this sense, Black nationalism was defined far more rigidly along the lines of ideological conformity than Zionism was. 

While some in the established Black intelligentsia continued to concentrate on broadening and consolidating recent gains made possible by the moderate politics of the civil rights movement, large segments of the Black intelligentsia were forced to adopt or fabricate a lower-class-oriented Black
militancy along the lines drawn by the paraintellectuals. Many in the established Black intelligentsia also found that the nationalist militancy of the paraintellectuals was a useful tool with which they were able to impress upon white establishment figures the need to open greater opportunities to Blacks. This dynamic worked in another direction as well. When white-controlled institutions began to concede new roles and benefits to the established Black intelligentsia, it helped to confer upon them legitimacy in the eyes of the urban Black lower classes. 203

Another important aspect of this phenomenon was the relationship of the Black paraintellectuals to the 1960s cult of violence. The confluence of Black Power rhetoric and ideology with that of the New Left manifested itself in a number of ways, including the tendency to substitute rhetoric for political analysis and violent gestures for political action. 204 But where these tactics resulted in the dismal political failure of the New Left by the early 1970s, it had resounding success for the new Black intelligentsia, which looked upon antiwhite violence, both rhetorical and actual, as serving the twofold purpose of validating Black manhood and coercing concessions from white institutions. In a seemingly apt description of what took place during the New York City teachers' strike in 1968, one Black sociologist wrote, "In several cities, Black teachers, writers, and artists had joined forces with Black paraintellectuals to disseminate a veritable cult of violence." 205 Black Power's use of the "Mau-Mau," a phrase coined by the author Tom Wolfe to describe the technique of public extortion used by Black paraintellectuals, was particularly effective because it made demands of whites while at the same time insisting that white America could never repent for the evil it inflicted on Blacks. 206 As white Americans became increasingly conscious of past injustices against Blacks, and of their own relative affluence, they became eager to repent for America's racist past, and they were particularly receptive to what the progenitors of Black Power put forth as the most effective ways for doing so. This phenomenon was, in part, responsible for the adoption of the whole panoply of demands for race-based preferential treatment, including the redrawning of electoral districts to favor Black candidates, "open" and preferential university admissions, Black studies departments, government contract set-asides, community control of governmental institutions, and government and private foundation support for particular Black objectives. One may argue the relative merits of such policies for fulfilling the objectives of racial justice, but the role that Black Power played in getting them instituted seems all but undeniable. 207 Whatever they may ultimately mean for Black advancement,
these changes have resulted in an official and legally acknowledged reracialization of American life, in which the important differences between groups come down to the color of their skin. This is as it always has been, except for the small window of opportunity that opened up somewhere during the years leading up to and through 1965 but that Black Power helped to quickly slam shut.

It is from the vantage point of these changes that a sober judgment must be rendered on the effectuation of Black Power in American life, and not from the standpoint of Zionism or any other nationalism. This seems to be the case particularly for liberal American Jews, whose attachment to such Enlightenment values as individualism, equal opportunity, personal freedom, and merit-based advance leaves them with much at stake in the success or failure of Black Power, as it has manifested itself in American life. Apparently, the reliance of some Jewish leaders and intellectuals on the Black American epic for their own identities prevented them from seeing the choices as clearly as they might have.

*Ben Halpern and the Sober View of Black Nationalism*

Of all Jewish thinkers in the postwar period, none seemed to wrestle as honestly, coherently, and realistically with Black Power as the scholar Ben Halpern. Halpern took the opportunity in his 1971 book, *Jews and Blacks*, to fully explicate his belief that the Black Power movement had, in fact, gone a long way toward developing an ideological consensus among Blacks and to explore the possibility that this may not have the positive effect on American pluralism that many liberal Jews expected it to.

A lifelong Labor Zionist, Halpern firmly believed that American Jews, though they refused to recognize it, were still in exile, or *galut*, and that this condition put them on significantly less intimate terms with American culture than Black Americans. Even with the increasing ability of Jews to integrate on many different levels, Halpern believed that Jews remained unassimilable because, at bottom, the United States was a Christian society that held beliefs about group life that Jews simply could not hold. Blacks remained, of course, excluded because of the racist habits that had survived their emancipation, but the Jews were not of America, not integral to it, as Blacks were. As Halpern saw it, authentic Judaism did not provide principles for the social organization of America and was not essential to the American way of life. By contrast, the Civil War and Reconstruction fixed
the pattern of American politics for generations, and the travail of the Black American belonged fully and tragically to American history. Therein lies the distinction Halpern made between the Jews as an “ideological” minority and the Blacks as a “social” minority; for Blacks, the primary source of their segregation was their social position, while for Jews it was the ancient culture they were identified with. But it was the strikingly divergent ways that both groups approached their group status that was most intriguing to him.

Halpern believed that Black Americans were developing something resembling a religious tradition, while American Jews were at the same time losing theirs. This role reversal was ironic, since Blacks based their own “quasi-revolution” largely on the myth of Jewish cohesiveness. In fact, Halpern wrote, the “Jew today is about as confused in his identity, as communally undisciplined, and, in his own way, as detached from historical roots as the American Negro.” But while Halpern was under no illusions regarding the difficulty Blacks faced building their new ideological opposition to American society, he stood by his belief that American Jews faced a greater crisis than Black Americans and articulated his arguments in terms of the Jewish response to Black anti-Semitism.209

Halpern felt that there was only one adequate Jewish response to Black anti-Semitism: “immediate, unequivocal resistance.” But Jews in their current position were not able to provide this response because their primary goal was assimilation. “Only liberated peoples, who do not want to integrate but only to coexist in equality, can achieve a reasonable, mutually agreeable, contractual relationship . . . with others.” It was Jewish disorganization stemming from the desire to gain acceptance that prevented Blacks and Jews in America from enjoying a mutually respectful relationship. “For many purposes . . . [the Jews] are not a single community; and this is so precisely because of their unwillingness to place barriers in the way of their integration with American society.”210

Halpern’s assumption that anti-Semitism was more profound in the United States than racism derived from his view of America as a pluralistic society sharply divided along religious lines and probably led him to overestimate the continuing tension between Christianity and Judaism. While there can be no doubt that such tensions continue, it is not unreasonable to assume that the increasing secularization of American life has greatly weakened them. So while the pressures of being an ideological minority exist, they exist at a much lower level than they did before.211

But, on another level, Halpern’s intimation that the United States is less
Blacks are achieving what many, including Halpern, had thought impossible Jacob Cohen bears this out. In a bold and lucid critique of Halpern’s book, Cohen expressed his belief that Black nationalism was here to stay and that Halpern should feel encouraged by this rather than be traumatized by its relatively “benign” anti-Semitism. Citing the establishment of what in effect are publicly funded parochial schools for Black students, the overwhelming acceptance of preferential quotas, government expenditures on “Black needs,” foundation support for programs to develop “Black leaders” for the “Black community,” the collaboration of “white universities” in the imposition of ideological tests on Black applicants, and the organization of Black political parties, Cohen argued that the term “Black” had been transformed from a biological to an ideological category, all with the approval of the wider American community. Cohen believed American Jews would greatly benefit from the success Blacks have had in stretching the pluralistic character of American life. If one were to compare what the Blacks had been doing with the Jewish minority rights movement of Eastern Europe eighty years prior, Cohen noted, “he might conclude that the Blacks are achieving what many, including Halpern, had thought impossible: quasi-official status as a legitimate minority; full acceptance of ideological/mythic dissidence.”

In response, Halpern elucidated the central point about what the Black revolution in America meant for Jews. The Black revolution, Halpern asserted, would not result in greater public recognition of all ideologically dissident groups because Blacks had a very deep and unique claim on the American conscience. Black demands were being tolerated because Blacks occupy a special position in the American social conscience and because the cry that Blacks make for greater group recognition is understood as a protest against social and economic discrimination. These demands would not be tolerated if they were put forth on the grounds that Blacks have a right to live permanently outside the consensus because of fundamentally different values, as any Jewish appeal of this nature would have to assert. If anything, Halpern felt that the Black revolution might result in the greater acceptance of public responsibility for the poor and disadvantaged, but he suggested that this would benefit certain other ethnic groups only to the extent that they were impoverished. Cohen’s hopes for a Jewish
group life that emulated the Black revolution were therefore inconceivable, since such a life would amount to a demand for the recognition of the same group rights that Blacks were beginning to obtain.

Though Halpern was a Labor Zionist deeply concerned about maintaining a Jewish communal consensus in the United States, he recognized not only that American Jews could never garner the same kind of public support Blacks received for their claim to permanent opposition but that a nation that would honor such a claim by Jews would have to honor all such claims. Jews might not, therefore, end up in as comfortable a situation as they currently enjoyed. Halpern was far happier with "consensus by tacit consent," and he felt better about being a Jew in a dominant Christian culture than he did about being one in a society with no consensus whatsoever. "What all this implies is that I confess to a certain fondness for the American way of life, in which I can only function as a member of a tolerated minority—and... as a citizen who observes voluntary self-denial in exercising his rights and duties as a participating American."213 Demonstrating great prescience, Halpern argued that the creation of official categories of groups in the United States would not be as great an opportunity for Jewish group fulfillment as many liberal Jews seemed to believe it would, and he maintained a stubborn belief that it was better for American Jews to erect their own barriers to assimilation rather than have them erected by the state, as they had been for Blacks.

As it turns out, both Halpern and Cohen were good prognosticators. Even Cohen could not have predicted how far the Black revolution would stretch the bounds of group pluralism, a pluralism that now covers the public recognition of racial, nonwhite ethnic, gender, and, increasingly, sexual preference groups. But Halpern was right to assert that this would probably not benefit American Jews or strengthen the American Jewish group consensus. For public purposes Jews are "white," and "official" group pluralism is encouraged mainly for Blacks and other nonwhites. In this sense, Halpern's thesis that Jews are in some ways more estranged in the United States than Blacks takes on a sober and chilling resonance. History and circumstance have made the United States willing to accommodate publicly a Black ideological minority, just as history and circumstance have denied this to the Jews. For the most part, Jewish leaders and intellectuals have been unwilling to recognize and respond to the special burdens this implies.