

Jews and the African World

International Implications; Israel, Islam, Black Muslims, Africa and the Third World (1973)

By John Henrik Clarke

When the real tragedy of Black-Jewish relations is finally identified I think it will be the dictionary and how we have misused its words. Here is a case where semantics change depending on who is listening and what they are listening for. Your listener will often hear what you did not say and ignore what you said. The title for this conference is a good example of a poor and unimaginative use of words. What exactly do we mean by Black-Jewish relationship? From these words we have no way of knowing that there are Blacks who are also Jews.

In this paper I have asked and have tried to answer the questions: Who and what is a Jew and who and what is an African person? Inasmuch as Jews and African people have met many times on the crossroads of history we need to know the nature of these meetings from pre-biblical times to the present. Especially, we need to know more about the history of Egypt and that part of Western Asia that is called the Middle East. Here is where Jews and African people met for the first time. They have been meeting through the years and their relationships have been more good than bad.

This in essence, is the point that I was trying to explain at the 87th meeting of the American Historical Association, in New Orleans, on December 30, 1972. The panel session was called "Black Anti-Semitism: Myth or Reality." The chairman was Professor Louis Ruchames, of the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Beside myself the other main participant was Dr. Nicholas C. Polos, of La Verne College, in California. Comments on the papers came from Dr. Morris U. Schappes, Queens College City University of New York, who is also Editor of the magazine "Jewish Currents" and Dr. Phillip Foner, of Lincoln University.

Dr. Nicholas C. Polos' paper was on what he called "Black Anti-Semitism: A Historical Genesis." In spite of the title of his paper he did not talk about any "historical genesis of Black Anti-Semitism." His paper was mainly about some current dissatisfaction with the Jews and some ill-advised statements about Jews that were made by people like Malcolm X, James Baldwin and Harold Cruse. These statements, quoted out of context and misunderstood, did not prove that an entire people are anti-Semitic. The comments of Morris U. Schappes and Phillip Foner were more interesting to me, considering their radical political backgrounds. In their comments they were defenders of the European concept of history. Both of them took exception to the amount of space I took in my paper to explain the role of Egypt in world history and the fact that the Egyptians of the ancient world were a distance African people whose civilization was old before Europe was born; therefore, they could not have been what we now call a white people.

In the part of the session that followed the presentation of papers and comments, I tried to explain the favorable image of the Jews in the religious life of Black Americans. In the song, "Go Down Moses, Tell Old Pharaoh to Let My People Go," the Blacks who are of African descent are on the side of the fleeing Hebrews against the African Pharaoh. Again in the song, "Deep River My Home is Over Jordan," once more Black people are identifying culturally and geographically with the Jews of the ancient world.

In the fact and folklore of our resistance, the leaders of some of the best known of the revolts are nicknamed *Moses*. In alluding to these images my intent was to establish the fact that Jews have lived, in peace, among African people, and Arabs, longer than they have lived among other people, and that there is no historical basis for the charge of Black Anti-Semitism.

Looking again at the ancient world I maintain that Jews who originally came into Egypt were welcomed, and they rose to high positions in the Egypt of that day. The period of persecution, so overtold in the *Book of Moses* and other writings, did not start until the end of that period, and it started for political reasons that had no racial overtones.

According to tradition the seventy Jews who came into Egypt increased to 600,000 by the time of their flight from Egypt four hundred years later, indicating extensive intermingling between the Jews and the Africans. No matter who the original Jews were who came into Egypt, when they left four hundred years later, they were ethnically, culturally, and religiously an African people.

This kind of analysis of Black-Jewish relations can get you in a lot of trouble fast. I did not have to wait long to learn this. When I arrived back in New York from the conference in New Orleans, two days later, several editors had called my home requesting copies of the paper. A reporter from the Los Angeles Times interviewed me about the paper, the session at the American Historical Association conference on Black-Anti-Semitism: Myth or Reality and Black Jewish relationships in general. The interview was published in the Los Angeles Times issue of January 22, 1973, and was reprinted in several newspapers throughout the country. The title of the interview was a question: *Do The Jews Really Dominate Black Ghettos?* This title was provocative, though like most newspaper headings, inaccurate. Jewish influence in the Black ghettos is only part of what the interview was about.

We talked about a range of subjects, such as the tragic Jewish dominated school system of New York City, where Black and Puerto Rican children are not being educated for manhood and to hold future positions of power in a changing society. Control and not education is the name of the game in New York City. It is the same in Chicago, and in Boston, where the Irish dominate the educational system. Yet, no one is calling Black anti-Irish for objecting to the Irish control of the schools in Chicago, and in Boston. Why then in New York City are we being called anti-Semitic for objecting to Jewish control?

In the interview we also talked about the conflict in survival competition between minority peoples and the fact that Blacks are fighting for a piece of the "power pie." Figuratively speaking, the political pie is not getting any bigger, but those who are claiming pieces of it are becoming more numerous. The ethnic groups in the northern urban ghettos, mainly Blacks and Puerto Ricans, who were not in on the original cutting of the political pie, cannot get any pie until someone is willing to give up part of theirs. This, in essence, is what the Black-Jewish conflict in New York City is about. This, in part, is also what the fight against quotas and compensatory treatment for Blacks is about. A man with a quota of ten resents a man with a quota of zero who is willing to accept a quota of one because one is better than zero. The man with a quota of ten feels threatened by the man with a quota of zero, who for the time being might settle for a quota of one. The fear is that the quota of one for the man who has no quota at all might have to be taken from the man with the ten.

Soon after the interview appeared in the Los Angeles Times, January 22, 1973, the *Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith* was on the case. Completely misinterpreting what I said and what I meant. In their letter to Dr. Jacqueline G. Wexler, President of Hunter College, Milton A. Seymour, Chairman, New York Board, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, February 8, 1973, strongly suggested that I might not be the kind of teacher for the faculty of Hunter College. The matter was partly settled because the President of Hunter refused to panic and I was in a position to document everything I had said.

In spite of the danger and sensitivity, there is a need to open up this subject much further and look at the international implications of Israel in world politics; Islam, and its rising influence among non-Arab speaking people; the Black Muslim Movement in the United States; and Africa, and the Third World.

Modern Israel was born as a result of the troubles of Europe. The creation of this state has a pattern that can be traced back in European politics for more than two thousand years. Beginning with the invasion of Egypt by Alexander the so-called Great (331 B.C.), the Europeans have nearly always found a way to drain the diseased pulse from their political sores and the lands of other people. This pattern continued through the aggressive *Punic Wars* (265–201 B.C) that resulted in the destruction of the city of Carthage. From this period to the present day the relationship of Europeans to non-European people has been protracted aggression.

The problem of Israel stems from its European connection, Culture, and attitude. Her problems were created in Europe by Europeans and should have been solved in Europe by Europeans. In looking at the current problem between Israel, Islam, and the Arabs an important aspect in the history of both these people are unfortunately forgotten. A search through the history of the Arabs and Islam will reflect no

deep-seated hatred of Jews as a people.

What I believe is most objectionable is the arrogance and aggression that stems from their European and American connection.

It's assuming that the African states that broke off diplomatic relations with the Israel are the captives of the Arabs. The role of Israel deteriorated in Africa when the African began to observe that they were not radically different from other European people in their attitudes and their actions and their relationship with South Africa, Rhodesia, and Portugal was not to Africa's best interest.

It is my opinion that in choosing such allies the Israelis are making one of the greatest mistakes in their history. They are aligning themselves with the forces of white supremacy that is diametrically opposed to the interest of most of mankind. I think they have made a political mistake of disastrous proportions and I compare their present political position with the period of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt and the period and time that followed the loss of the connections with the courts that Joseph made for them.

And, I wonder will their present position lead to another time when a king will arise figuratively speaking, who politically knew not Joseph.

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