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RISING TIDE OF NEGRO-JEWISH TENSIONS

By Rabbi Richard C. Hertz

YOUNG GIRL WITH A HOLE IN HER HEART

PIONEERS IN PROTEST
PART X

JOHN BROWN: GOD'S ANGRY MAN



**THE HOME LIFE
OF MAI BRITT
AND
'GOLDEN BOY'**

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RISING TIDE OF NEGRO-JEWISH TENSIONS

Jews' race bias and Negroes' anti-Semitism hurts the common cause of both minorities

BY RABBI RICHARD C. HERTZ, Ph. D.

RECENTLY I read James Baldwin's latest book, *The Fire Next Time*. It really disturbed me. It is a soul-burst, not so much a sociological treatise as it is the candid confession of an angry young Negro laying bare his soul, and, in the process, searing the soul of his readers. Baldwin's cry is for ultimate human equality.

Why did this book disturb me so, I wondered? After all, I have been in the forefront in the battle for civil rights. Why should I feel guilty for what has been left undone? Certainly, I have been aware, and I have made my congregation aware from the pulpit, of the special concern of Jews and Judaism in race relations. I have not waited for February's Brotherhood Week to preach brotherhood with our Negro fellow Americans. Again and again, I have spoken about the moral core of this problem.

As a rabbi, I know of the great commitment to racial justice that Judaism proclaims—the biblical belief in man's innate dignity. As a Jew, I know the historical experience of my people in being frequently oppressed and exiled as a marginal minority.

So what am I worried about? Why did James Baldwin's book stir me and trouble me?

Because I'm worried not just about Negroes, but about Jews. I know that Jews like myself

have thrown themselves into the battle for civil rights. We are no Johnny-come-latelies. We had a head start in the civil rights race. After World War II the Jewish civic protective agencies—the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, Jewish community councils and all the others—were in the forefront of the battle.

But now, something has happened. White liberal groups, like the Jews, are no longer the leaders in the civil rights fight. Negroes are. New Negro leaders, like Martin Luther King Jr., and even more militant Negro organizations have challenged and pushed aside traditional white leadership. They have set the timetable. They have called the plays. They have cried out, "We want our freedom, and we want our freedom now."

Direct action, marching in the streets, boycotts, sitdowns, picketing, demonstrations, marches—these have come in a breathtaking pace of events in the late 50s and soaring 60s. White Jewish organizations are still passing resolutions and issuing statements, Negro leadership has swept past them with direct action. Jews started in the leadership, but now others—including Catholics and Protestants—have seized the torch. On paper, most Jews think they are still more liberal on race relations

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Rundown tenements, like those in Harlem (above), in which Negroes are forced to pay exorbitant rents for sub-standard facilities (below), are breeding places for hatred of white landlords and anti-Semitism if landlords happen to be Jewish.



Julius Rosenwald (right), late Jewish businessman and philanthropist, used much of the \$63 million he gave to worthy causes to help better lot of Negroes. South Side Chicago housing complex (below) was named Rosenwald Apartments (now Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments) in his honor.



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than Christians, but Christians are probing their souls, while Jews appear to be resting on past laurels. To Christians, race is not just a problem—it is an opportunity to make their religious faith vital and relevant. To Jews, the Negro Revolution seems to revolve around who is buying the house on their block.

Albert Vorspan recently wrote a searing indictment called "The Negro Victory and the Jewish Failure" in *American Judaism*. He denounced the unspoken compulsion of American Jews to "play it cool," not to become involved, to sit this revolution out. "Is it quixotic," he wrote, "to expect American Jews to be different from everyone else, to rise above the level of sick American culture, and to stand for racial justice as the Quakers do for world peace? Perhaps it is. But if that is the case, we should be more honest with ourselves. We should stop talking about the mission of Israel. We should stop boasting to the rafters that our forebears gave the world the concept of the unity of mankind as the children of One God. We should stop preaching sermons at each other and at America. We should cleanse our prayer-books of those words like justice and brotherhood which our mindless repetitions have long since robbed of all meaning. And we should stop pretending to be Jews."

So you see what I am worried about. The current theme of Jewish leaders is that America must not be a nation of neutral onlookers in the civil rights struggle—that Jews and others must speak up and act, otherwise be as guilty as the non-Nazis in Germany were who looked the other way when Jews were persecuted.

But a gap exists between the pulpit and the pew, both in churches and in synagogues. There is fear of Negroes moving next door. There is fear of having one's own children attend public school with Negro youngsters.

I worry about Negro-Jewish tensions because I know that the image of the Jew in the Negro community is not altogether good. To be sure,



Harlem stores, many owned by Jews, do thriving business among Negroes, but rarely contribute to economic growth of community. One gouging Jewish landlord or shop owner, says Rabbi Hertz, can undo the good done by 100 Jewish NAACP members.

NEGRO-JEWISH TENSIONS *Continued*

individual Jews have been like giants in the civils right battle—a David Dubinsky or an Arthur Goldberg in the labor scene; or a generation ago, a Julius Rosenwald and his philanthropy for the disadvantaged Negro. But like the fight against anti-Semitism, one Jewish merchant contemptuous of his Negro clientele can do more damage to our image in the Negro community than the good done by 1,000 Jewish members of the NAACP. Of course, it's not fair, you say, but look at the way one Negro writer projected his image of the Jew: "He's out for all he can get from anybody and everybody."

A Negro sociologist, Dr. Eric Lincoln, put it this way: "The Jew opens a business and hires his whole family. Meanwhile, the so-called Negroes are footing the bill, but there isn't a black face behind a single counter in the store . . . He will open up another business. Still later he will open a liquor store . . . Soon he follows his Negro customer home and buys the flat he lives in. By that time the Jew is providing the Negro with his food, his clothes, his services, his home and the whisky he has to have to keep from hating himself. But the Jew doesn't live above the business anymore. He's moved on out to the suburbs and is living in the best house black money can buy."

Sure, there are good shopkeepers and bad shopkeepers, there are good landlords and gouging landlords; but the bad ones tend to leave the more lasting and damaging impressions.

I worry about Negro-Jewish tensions because Jews reflect in their attitude the prevalent anti-Negro stereotype, just as many Negroes echo the prevalent anti-Jewish stereotype. It seems to me there is a great need for understanding in this period of mutual irritation and conflict over the Negro Revolution. We ought not exaggerate or overstate the recriminations of the conflict, for the two communities have too many vital interests at stake to fall into sterile, intramural warfare. Both Negro and Jewish communities are insecure minorities deeply committed to the goals of full integration in a democratic society. What everyone needs is understanding on both sides, not to exaggerate differences nor to sweep them under the rug; but to recognize the important interests that responsible leadership must uphold—both Negro and Jewish leadership.

What's it all about, these Negro-Jewish tensions?

In many of the big cities of the North and East, growing tensions between Negroes and whites are often accompanied by growing tensions between Negroes and Jews. At the very time when communication should be better, there appears to have been a deterioration in understanding and contacts with Negroes.

The world situation has had its impact. The rise of nationalism in Africa has fanned the flames of anti-white, anti-Christian, anti-Jewish, anti-colonial hatred among dissident Negro groups in America. They often identify themselves with their black kinsmen in Africa. They fight the battle of the Congo at City Hall.

In America, the great metropolitan areas have seen massive population changes, along with tensions threatening to disrupt the progress



Rights action groups, like volunteers in Mississippi Summer Project above, have many Jews in their ranks. Two of them, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, were murdered with Negro fellow volunteer James Chaney by white Mississippi bigots.

made in inter-group relations in the last two decades. Internal migration within the United States on a tremendous scale began during World War II when Negroes from the South came to Northern cities for jobs. As part of America's continuing urbanization, Negroes came from Southern agricultural areas into the industrial sections of the North and West, where four-fifths of them now live in urbanized areas. Their proportion to white urban residents has grown significantly. Today thirty per cent, maybe slightly more, of Detroit's population is Negro. In the process of migration, both to and from the central city, Negroes and Jews have come into greater contact than previously. The general tensions that prevail are heightened by anti-Semitism among some Negroes and by anti-Negro attitudes among some Jews. An additional difficulty in Negro-Jewish relations is the fact that many Negroes have extremely high expectations of Jewish behavior toward them, and on the other hand, many Jews are burdened by guilt because of their flight from Negroes and Negro problems in their attempt to make secure their own middle class status.

Where do these tensions arise? Out of housing, education, crime, economic opportunity and political representation.

Need I mention housing, its shortages, the slum character of most housing available to non-whites, the creation of ghetto neighborhoods because of discrimination, and the explosive situations that arise from changing neighborhoods?

Need I mention tensions in education that have arisen because segregated slums in run-down parts of central cities naturally have segregated schools, antiquated, hazardous, inadequate for the swelling school populations? And as a result, Negro children attending schools in segregated slum areas are being deprived of their full educational opportunities.

Need I tell you how economic opportunity is denied Negroes who must be the "last to be hired, the first to be fired," who are deprived of opportunities to enter certain occupations or to advance beyond a certain level?

Need I mention how politics and the demands for proportional representation in public life have given rise to new political conflict over the ballot box? Negroes are using political pressures of block voting to help them attain rights and positions from which they have been deprived by discrimination and prejudice.

Though it is more than 100 years since Emancipation, no Negro in America has been truly emancipated from the restrictions of a white man's world. Not even a Ralph Bunche or a Jackie Robinson has escaped the lot of being Negro in America. North or South, American Negroes live in a world shaped for them by white society—a world of deprivation and alienation.

The failure of white America to treat Negroes as fully human has brought upon the white world a bitterness and a hatred indescribably sharp. And Jews are white, part of the hated white world.

Let us look at specific Negro-Jewish tensions. Hatred of the Jews, according to the perceptive James Baldwin, is "the best form the Negro

al casks by Barton Distillers Import Co., New York, New York—80 proof—The traditional proof of fine Scotch Whisky in the United Kingdom.

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Harry Golden, editor of *Carolina Israelite* and author of *Only In America*, is among South's most vocal proponents of racial equality. He insists that "there exists in our country today almost total segregation of Jew and gentile on the social level."

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has for tabulating vocally his long record of grievances against his native land . . . But just as society must have a scapegoat, so hatred must have a symbol. Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew."

There you have it. Whatever Jews do is apt to evoke Negro criticism or suspicion. If Jews are prejudiced, Negroes are likely to say that they should know better since they are a persecuted group themselves. If Jews are active in working for Negro rights, they are sometimes accused of concealing their self-interest or exploiting the Negro situation for their own advancement.

In turn, there is anti-Negro feeling among Jews. Just as some Negroes have harbored Christian prejudices against Jews, so have some Jews harbored white prejudices against Negroes. The "Jewish"—actually middle class—values that make Jews an object of envy among upwardly mobile Negroes are likely to intensify anti-Negro prejudices among Jews: family, education, sobriety, material success and horror of violence.

Before World War II, Negro domestic workers usually knew Jews chiefly as employers, or as landlords of tenements, or as small businessmen in Negro ghettos. Always the Negro was the inferior, and his stereotype of the Jew was too often the exploiter, the gouger. The Negro only naturally resented the Jew.

With the rise of the Negro middle class and the Civil Rights Revolution, contacts between Jews and Negroes have become more frequent and on different levels: as neighbors and as co-workers in community causes. Often they came together as equals rather than as inferiors or superiors. Yet sometimes there was resentment because of Negro aspirations to become equals.

Changing neighborhoods also reflected tensions between the two groups. Negroes often view the flight of whites to the suburbs as a social rebuff. Negroes themselves flee from overcrowded ghettos that spawn crime and violence. Yet, curiously they resent the Jewish flight, and those Jews who choose to remain in racially changing neighborhoods either feel strange or martyrs to a cause.

Jewish communal institutions, like hospitals and community centers, have not always found it possible to flee from changing neighborhoods and in some cases have remained to chart a new frontier in improved group relations.

What is the outlook? With continued prosperity and conspicuous consumption, the Negro middle class will continue to grow in affluence and ambition. Negroes will not be content, nor should they be, to remain on the lowest rung of the political ladder. They have discovered

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the power of the voting poll. They know that better education and better housing and better job opportunities are their right; and as they take greater advantage of these opportunities, they are inevitably coming into conflict with various white groups, including Jews.

It is a pity that so few Jews understand the social motivation of the Negro Revolution. Jewish ignorance about Negro life and the just aspirations of that suffering race block real advancement toward improving relations between the two groups. No longer will Negroes tolerate any patronizing condescension of "tolerant" whites. This changing attitude, brought on by being better fed, better housed, better clothed, better educated, better disciplined than a decade ago, all means that Negroes are growing more self-reliant, less submissive than before.

To be sure, there are prejudiced Jews. There are anti-Semitic Negroes. There are tensions between the two groups. But I believe the dangers to both minorities in America are too real to be ignored. If the tensions are to be removed, both groups will have to apply themselves with wisdom and understanding. The future depends equally on the honest and forthright manner with which Jews face the complexities of the Negro Revolution in America in which, for better or worse, both are involved.

What should the Jew do? What should be the attitude of the American Jew toward this civil rights revolution? What has this moral crisis over race to do with Judaism?

Everything! It has everything to do with Judaism. My people wrote the book on this subject—The Book of Books. We Jews know what it's like to be cast out as the stranger and the homeless. We wandered for forty years in the desert before coming to a Promised Land, and then we had a hard battle to win open occupancy and a fair share of freedom. In the long centuries of history, we learned what it means to be harried, and harassed and haunted, the last to benefit and the first to be denied. We lived in the blackest ghettos of misery. We tasted the salt of our own tears.

But we, too, had a dream. We heard in our ears over and over again the words of the Torah: "Justice, Justice shalt thou pursue . . ." We heard the voices of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Malachi ring out: "The work of justice shall be righteousness and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever."

Why should Jews be concerned with the race crisis? Because we are human beings too. Because we are sensitive to suffering wherever it springs. Because we are responsible citizens. Because our religion teaches us to help the less fortunate. Because the Negro's battle for fair play is the Jew's battle for equality.

I hold it is incumbent upon Jews, in the light of Jewish religious and prophetic tradition, to understand the psychology of the civil rights revolution. Jews cannot with conscience shun a neighbor because of his color, or segregate children in public school, or deny equal job opportunity in business. We who have experienced humiliation cannot humiliate others. We who have suffered segregation cannot segregate others. We who have been denied opportunity cannot deny opportunity to others.

Restrictions Jews face in housing notoriously persist throughout the country. These restrictions do not approach, however, the magnitude of housing restrictions against other minorities because of race. The American goal of equality of housing opportunity will not be achieved until the racial barriers, as well as the religious barriers, have been torn down, and the tragic fate of the non-white citizens of this country—inequality, ghettoization, and slums—are changed.

This much is basic strategy. *What helps one minority group, helps all minority groups. What hurts one minority hurts all.* Since Jews are members of a minority group in this country, our interests in equality of opportunity is a basic concern not only as Americans, but as Jews.

Freedom is indivisible. It is for all or for none. Jews are safe only when everyone else is safe. When the rights of all are secure, then the rights of Jews are secure. That is the way freedom works.

I, as a Jew, cannot divorce myself from society. I am involved in mankind, a part of the main. Therefore, never send to ask "for whom the bell tolls" and wonder, "Why am I fighting for the Negro and his right to live where he wants to live, and send his children to the neighborhood public school?"

I speak not as a Jew fighting for Negro rights. I speak as a Jew fight-

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ing for what is morally right and decent. I speak for freedom and for democracy. Only when there is equality of opportunity for *all* citizens of America to live where they want on what they can afford, and not ghettoized into restricted areas as in a pressure cooker, nor coralled into a dilapidated central city soon scheduled for the bulldozers of urban renewal, can we call this America.

Emanuel Muravchick recently wrote in *The Call*: "While the Jewish community and its leadership cannot be held responsible for the abuses of individual slum landlords, employers, shopkeepers or professionals who happen to be Jewish, it must persist in the fight for better housing laws enforcement, a greater supply of housing, decent minimum wage laws, improved standards, additional civil rights legislation and more complete enforcement of present legislation. Within the Jewish community, Jewish leadership must fight the baneful stereotype of the Negro as an inferior. This can be done through a patient process of education and by encouraging continuing contact between Negro and Jewish spokesmen on a peer to peer basis—equals to equals. The Negro community must be shown by our daily deeds that it can look to the Jewish community for understanding and support.

On the Negro side, its leadership must unconditionally reject anti-Semitism, direct or indirect, as a weapon of social struggle in any of its forms. So long as anti-Semitism is a phenomenon within Negro life, the leadership has a responsibility to especially acknowledge the contribution of the Jewish community toward the struggle of the Negro people for equality. The advanced Negro leader must help to enlighten his community to understand that the source of slums, and exploitation, is to be found in society at large and its institutions . . . The fight for Negro equality and integration is itself an integral part of the struggle for fuller democracy and a better America."

More dialogue is needed between the Negro and the Jew, particularly to dramatize the principle that conflict between Negroes and Jews serves only the cause of the segregationist.

Dialogue makes for a two-way street. Better relations are not just one-way traffic. Heated but honest discussion will not reduce to shambles the good relationships of dialogue.

James Baldwin has made white society painfully aware of how wide is the gulf that separates the white man's understanding of the Negro's predicament and the Negro's own search for his own identity, his own situation. "Freedom" and "justice" and "integration" are empty words to whites until writers like Baldwin make them understand the reality of the Negro's daily plight.

James Baldwin has done something for me. He has made me realize that the time has come to work even harder for freedom now, for human dignity to all God's children. I will be a better Jew for that struggle. I will be a better American for helping to make democracy come true. I will be a truer child of God for believing that human dignity depends no less upon the Negro than upon the Jew.



Jack Greenberg, successor of Thurgood Marshall as the NAACP's legal chief, is highest-ranking Jew on staff of nation's largest civil rights organization. Photo shows him in his New York office with prominent NAACP legal aide Constance Motley.