

HOW NEW YORK'S JEWS WERE TURNED AGAINST BLACK MEN:

Exploding the Myth of Black Anti-Semitism

This is the story of a political lie, a New York political lie that clangs through the city like a false alarm in the night. It breeds hatred between two of the largest ethnic groups in the city—as it was meant to do. It allows the powerful to step on the powerless—as it was meant to do. It has made many men so frightened they are now willing to forego their own rights as citizens in order to prevent other citizens from enjoying the same rights. And this, most of all, it was meant to do. The lie has a name: it is "black anti-Semitism."

What? people will say, how can black anti-Semitism be a lie. Didn't Leslie Campbell, a black teacher from the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district, read a student's anti-Semitic verse over radio station WBAI-FM? Didn't black "militants" at public meetings cast aspersions on the motives of the "Jewish-dominated UFT" (the United Federation of Teachers) and the performance of the "Jewish-dominated school system"? And what of those ugly anti-Jewish leaflets the UFT thoughtfully flooded the city with to teach us the depth and extent of black anti-Semitism? What New Yorker has not heard of these things, especially during the past three months.

As will be seen, the above "incidents" pretty much sum up the case for black anti-Semitism now being made by interested parties. But the charge of black anti-Semitism does not rest on such incidents; it takes off from them and never looks back.

We are told in January by a Special Committee on Race and Religious Prejudice, appointed by Mayor John Lindsay last November, that "an appalling amount of racial prejudice—black and white—surfaced in and about the school controversy, the anti-white prejudice has a dangerous component of anti-Semitism." As matters now go in New York, this is the fairest comment you are likely to find, but note that while anti-black prejudice is "appalling," anti-Semitic prejudice is "dangerous," which is to say, the first is morally repellent but the latter, in addition, is politically significant.

Other spokesmen are not quite this subtle. We are told by the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish watchdog agency, that "raw, undisguised anti-Semitism is at a crisis-level in New York City schools" and that "the use of anti-Semitism—raw, undisguised—has distorted the fundamental character of the controversy surrounding the public schools of New York City." We are told by a member of the New York City Board of Education, Mrs. Rose Shapiro, that "there is a battle raging to destroy the city's fabric. This new wave of racism has engulfed our city." Engulfment, nothing less.

Calls now go out almost daily to find and denounce the black culprits; to denounce, dismiss and impeach any official deemed derelict in his duty to suppress these black attacks upon Jews. "We put black racists on notice," warns the American Jewish Committee, "that we are determined to use every legal means to let no one get away with any efforts to inflict pain or suffering on any Jewish person."

For failing to combat black anti-Semitism with sufficient "vigilance," William Booth, a black man, lost his post as head of the city's Human Rights Commission. Back in November, Mayor Lindsay could still tell a Jewish audience that "we will not tolerate false attacks of anti-Semitism against all those who have favored community responsibility in our schools. Many of the attacks were vicious slanders." Now, for not acting as if every slander were proven fact, Mr. Booth is found unfit for his job.

A Jewish official writing in *Commentary*, an eminent intellectual journal sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, has now drawn the political implications of this new insurgent black anti-Semitism. It is no longer a question, he argues in the January issue, of Jews being "liberal" toward black aspirations. "There is, more clearly than ever before the legitimate and independent imperative for self-survival." In plain words, black anti-Semitism has grown so threatening that Jews must cease to support black activists and start defending themselves against them.

This then is the significance we are asked to give to black anti-Semitism. It is a force so intense and so potent (though but a few months old) that it constitutes a "crisis," "engulfs" the city, tears apart its "fabric" and threatens the safety of the city's 1.8 million Jews. For three hundred years black men in America have been as politically impotent as doormats. Suddenly, in the past three months they are being portrayed as the most potent force in a giant metropolis.

How Black Anti-Semitism Rose to the "Surface" Just in the Nick of Time

One interesting feature of black anti-Semitism is its extraordinary timeliness from the viewpoint of the teachers' union and others opposing school decentralization. It "surfaced" so the story goes, during the UFT's bitter strikes last fall and has been publicized with ever increasing intensity during the past two months, just when the Mayor's decentralization plan nears the New York State legislature for approval next month.

The plan would give New York's citizens the wholly novel (for New York) opportunity to elect their own, partly independent, local school boards, but the sudden upsurge of black anti-Semitism has tarnished the plan considerably. It is "proving" to many that decentralization will pave the way for vicious vendettas against the Jewish school teachers of the city, a point the head of the UFT, Albert Shanker, has made from the start. Local control of the schools, he has frequently charged, "would open up a field day for bigots." Now men of good will are coming around to his farsighted view. Mrs. Shapiro, who as president of the Board of Education, opposed school decentralization before there was a hint of racial strife, now suavely votes against it on the grounds that "there must be a respite for the schools until the community can recover its sanity."

How convenient the black anti-Semitism charge is. Indeed, it is difficult to see what the opponents of decentralization—the UFT, the school bureaucracy, the trade union movement, the Democratic city machine—would have done without it. A recent Louis Harris poll (which stacked the deck against decentralization by terming it "community influence," a veritable pejorative) showed, nevertheless, that the majority of Jews still favors decentralization, that the large majority of black men favor decentralization, that three out of four New Yorkers think it would do some good in improving education.

Black anti-Semitism has had a lot of work to do and now, in the nick of time, it is doing it.

It is time, now too, to unmask the lie and in doing so a fundamental point about charges of anti-Semitism must be made clear. The extent, the intensity, and the danger of anti-Semitism in any community is a direct function of whether or not Jewish leaders and powerful political figures choose to minimize or maximize its significance. Some anti-Semitic incidents occur in every community. The question is how will they be assessed. One example from the January 1969 Anti-Defamation League report on black anti-Semitism illustrates the point. In its dossier it slates a black man for saying that his group is "demanding teacher responsibility. If they can't produce, go elsewhere. If they can't get these black kids up to grade level—teach elsewhere." This can be considered a perfectly reasonable remark, or it can be viewed as the ADL now insists it be viewed, as an example of "attempts to drive Jewish teachers and principals out of the schools." The decision is entirely a political one.

Practically speaking, two conditions are required to make anti-Semitism a political issue. First, it can only be attributed to people who are politically powerless like black people, for the powerless can be portrayed as being anything those with power wish to describe them as being. Secondly, it requires the active complicity of powerful political elements, for the Jewish organizations have neither the power, nor, being for the most part liberal-minded, the desire to exaggerate charges of anti-Semitism—especially against black people. The political decision to do so lies in other hands and in the present case the Jewish organizations were pressured to follow suit.

Jewish Groups Swing From Minimizing Black Bigotry to Exaggerating It

From 1966 to the fall of 1968, it was the consistent policy of almost every major Jewish organization to minimize the significance of occasional reports of black anti-Semitism. Again and again, Jewish organizations warn their membership (source for the following is *The New York Times*) that such tales are "exaggerated" and misrepresented. What they feared was not black prejudice against Jews, but Jewish prejudice against black men. They warn time and again that too many Jews were using a few statements by unrepresentative "extremists" (the same unrepresentative extremists are now held to be powerful enough to tear apart New York) as an excuse for their own bigotry. On April 28, 1966, for example, an American Jewish Congress spokesman coined the term "Jewish backlash" and denounced stories of black anti-Jewish sentiment as "overblown," emphasizing instead "the strong identification Negroes have with Jews."

On October 13, 1967, the National Community Relations Council, representing many Jewish organizations, issued a guide which warned Jews against mistaking

"legitimate protest" by black men for anti-Semitism and warned them further against "exaggerating the true dimensions" of any anti-Jewish sentiments that might arise in future. To black criticism of Jewish merchants and ghetto landlords the Union of Hebrew Congregations replied on November 12, 1967, not with an attack on black anti-Semites, but with open criticism of certain Jews, urging "the exercise of moral pressure by the congregations and the rabbis upon those Jewish slumlords and ghetto profiteers." If a black man said those very words today in New York he would be slotted at once into an Anti-Defamation League dossier.

With few exceptions Jewish organizations followed the minimizing policy until the city-wide teachers' strike last autumn against the Ocean Hill school district, a black-led district with its own elected governing board that had been officially set up as an "experiment" in decentralization. At that point the first swing from minimizing to maximizing occurs.

The B'nai B'rith, already on record against "exaggerating" black anti-Semitism, now takes up (September, 1968) a defamatory slur against black men the UFT had been making for many months: "reverse racism."

"Negro demands," said B'nai B'rith president William Wexler, "to replace white teachers and others in the black community—many of whom are Jews—raises the question of whether the evil of discrimination can really be cured by substituting another." In May, 1968, the Ocean Hill governing board, one of the few black-led groups with any real power to practice discrimination, had transferred from the district, 19, mainly Jewish, teachers. Although the inebriated Shanker had promptly termed this "Nazism," the B'nai B'rith had refused at that time to play the union leader's game. Now, three months later when Ocean Hill was actually hiring scores of Jewish teachers, the B'nai B'rith begins crying up black anti-Semitism. One down.

As late as October 22, a spokesman for the American Jewish Committee could publicly accuse Shanker of "using the Jewish community" for his own purposes. Today the Committee is clamoring harshly for Jewish self-defense against the threat of black anti-Semitism, which in late October it strongly suspected Shanker of whistling up.

The American Jewish Congress has been vacillating woefully for months. A liberal group staunch in its opposition to Jewish "backlash" and a supporter of school decentralization from the start, the Congress did not cave in until early this February. On the second of the month it publicly called for delaying school decentralization on the grounds that more evidence about it was needed, which is to say, the Congress was for decentralization when nothing was known about it and is now against it because too little is known. Blaming the need for delay on black anti-Semites would have been far more persuasive, but the Congress still lacks the heart to credit its newly-discovered significance.

The Anti-Defamation League Works Up a Dossier of "Incidents"

Nothing, however, illustrates more graphically the abject surrender of the Jewish organizations than the record of the Anti-Defamation League, whose current stand on black anti-Semitism ("crisis-level") repudiates everything it has said before and does so with every cheap trick it can muster.

On May 24, 1967, it is well worth recalling, the League issued the results of its five-year study of black attitudes toward Jews. Its findings make interesting reading today. The ADL's survey found that black men were the least anti-Semitic Christian group in the country; that they were less likely than any white group to vote for a candidate who ran on an anti-Semitic platform; that the more "militant" a black man was, the less likely he was to be anti-white and anti-Jewish.

As late as October 23, 1968, when the teachers' strike was already in its second month, the ADL still held the line. That day it reported the results of its intensive study of anti-Jewish leaflets and found no evidence of any organized effort behind them. The leaflets were sporadic in content and issuance, a handful of ugly little productions without significant origin.

Now let us look at the dossier on black anti-Semitism in the city schools this same organization has compiled for its January report. We are, to put it mildly, in another world. From minimizing anti-Semitism, the League has turned with a vengeance to the task of blowing it up to "crisis" proportions. It does even more than this. Forgetful of the fact that until the end of October it had reported no dangerous evidence of black anti-Semitism, the League now tries to prove that in the two years prior to October, 1968 black anti-Semitism was steadily "building up" in the schools. The strategic significance of this is obvious: if black anti-Semitism merely "surfaced" during the strike, people might attribute it to the heat of battle, a battle in which the UFT defamed black men every time it took out a full-page ad warning against "mob-rule," a racist code word if ever there was one.

In the January report, the leaflets, hitherto insignificant, take the place of honor in the dossier. Not a word of their being sporadic is said, but the ADL, in its effort to show that black anti-Semitism flourished long before the strike, says too much. It notes now that the leaflets "had early origins and distribution and were recirculated" during the strike. Now these leaflets, as the ADL had insisted in October, represented no organized effort. Since the UFT undeniably recirculated them, it is obvious that the union had saved them up over a two-year period and unleashed them in a frightening barrage at the suitable moment. The ADL's account of how one such leaflet got circulated is a model of evasiveness. "The recipients [teachers] often reproduced it and sent it to friends as an indication of the climate in some city schools and the schools were soon flooded with copies." No wonder the UFT reprinted the ADL's report in the January 22 issue of its house organ.

In addition to the leaflets, the bulk of ADL's "proof" of a dangerous effort to "drive" Jewish personnel out of the schools consists of seven remarks made in April, May, June, and September 1967, and again in September, 1968. As if that were not meager enough, it turns out that four of the remarks were made by one Robert "Sonny" Carson, and two by his sidekicks in a rump organization known as Brooklyn Independent Core. The expulsion of the Jews—surely a pivotal point in demonstrating the danger of black anti-Semitism—turns out to be the theme song of a one-man band.

The ADL's attempt to prove that some key black leaders are anti-Semitic is similarly a dismal failure, though this too is a crucial point, since if only "extremists" are anti-Semites (as all agree) they must be the leaders of something to constitute a danger. The League's one effort involves David Spencer, Chairman of the I.S. 201 Complex governing board (the I.S. 201 Complex is an experimental district like Ocean Hill-Brownsville). Spencer is slated for anti-Semitism because of a letter he wrote in October, 1968 which the dossier describes as follows: "After complimenting Jews who are 'working tirelessly behind the scenes for self-determination in Black and Puerto Rican communities'—Spencer said, nevertheless, it is hard to keep from reacting against everyone Jewish when the full weight of the Jewish Establishment is not only beating our Black and Puerto Rican communities, but also accusing us of being the aggressor."

Any honest man would call this the plaintive cry of an ill-used man, and it is worth stopping a moment to consider the mind-torturing nastiness of this ADL citation. Here is a man openly and manfully complaining about organized Jewish efforts to use anti-Semitism as a weapon against him and for that he is charged with anti-Semitism. If you want to create anti-Semites that is as good a way as any to start.

Two-thirds of the way through the dossier we finally reach the "strike incidents" and learn that "anti-Semitism has also been clearly in evidence" during the whole two-and-a-half month period. Aside from the ever-usable pamphlets "recirculated" by the UFT at the time, the bulk of the evidence here consists of racial slurs hurled by black men at Jewish teachers standing on picket lines. Even Martin Mayer, who defended the UFT in a 23,000 word essay in *The New York Times Magazine* (February 2), was willing to admit that the teachers hurled as many insults at black onlookers as the onlookers hurled at them. So much for the "strike incidents," which seem to consist chiefly of street-slanging matches between bitter political opponents in a heated emotional state.

So much, too, for the ADL report whose general drift can be judged first by noting that the following statement made by a black man appears in the dossier as evidence of anti-Semitism: "The Jewish people have been in control of the public schools in this city and have done nothing to improve the education of Negro and Puerto Rican children." We are to take it that any black failure to compliment Jewish teachers is bigotry. It can be judged second by noting that the bulk of its evidence comes from statements by anonymous UFT members.

In truth, the ADL's efforts to demonstrate the menace of black anti-Semitism only proves the very opposite to be true. Consider that the black people of New

York are provoked every day by vicious lies and slanders; consider that it finds itself baffled at every turn by a Jewish union chief, by Jewish organizations, by Jewish Board of Education members, by Jewish judges and Jewish legislators and then consider the paltry findings of the ADL report. Truly, as that organization once demonstrated, there is no people in America less anti-Semitic than black people.

How the Teachers' Union Started the "Menace" of Black Anti-Semitism

One agent and one agent alone initiated the campaign to concoct a fake threat of black anti-Semitism. That was the United Federation of Teachers. Its intentions are transparent enough: the black anti-Semitism lie was the best means at hand to break the alliance between the liberal Jewish middle class and the black people of the city and so destroy the chances of school decentralization.

As far back as 1966, Shanker had begun sounding off about "reverse racism," a term meant to imply that if New Yorkers ever gained a voice in running their schools, white teachers would fall victims to black bigotry. The specific charge of black prejudice against Jews Shanker did not at first make public, beyond calling Ocean Hill's transfer of Jewish teachers "Nazism."

What he did instead was issue a dual set of accusations, one for the public and one for internal union consumption. In public he raised the disguised racist cry of "mob rule," in confident expectation that ordinary white prejudice against black men would be sufficient to defeat decentralization. Within the teachers' union, however, he had a different hand to play. The great majority of his members are Jewish. Whether they were anti-black or not they felt, being Jewish liberals, that they ought not to be. Nonetheless, under Shanker's leadership they were asked to fight militantly against black aspirations and they were hungry for justification, Shanker provided it. Within the union, starting around May, 1968, the now famous anti-Jewish leaflets were widely circulated to the rank-and-file by union chapter chairmen who got their sample copies at chapter chairmen meetings with the leadership.

It was not hard to convince Jewish teachers that their fight against decentralization was a fight to prevent black militants from launching pogroms against them. Most wanted to believe it anyway. Lest the anti-Semitic charge be thought too diffuse, an effort was made to link anti-Semitism directly to the Ocean Hill experimental district. One widely circulated leaflet was alleged by UFT circulators to have come from Ocean Hill teachers, a fabrication the New York Civil Liberties Union exposed in late October 1968. Another was attributed to an Ocean Hill parent group which, it turned out, was not from Ocean Hill, did not issue any such leaflet and, in fact, had Jewish members.

By the time the strikes began in early September, not only were teachers convinced of the anti-Semitism menace, but in an urgent effort to justify themselves they were carrying what the ADL describes as "the virus of anti-Semitism" from Jew to Jew, namely their families, relatives and friends, which itself made up a sizeable number.

As the strikes grew more bitter and the union's success in crushing Ocean Hill looked less and less assured, it took a drastic step: the union now made black anti-Semitism a public issue in order to raise Jewish people en masse against black men. The ever-useful leaflets, so carefully culled for so long, were now unleashed in Jewish neighborhoods while organized UFT hecklers invaded numerous public meetings to cry up charges of anti-Semitism whenever a proponent of decentralization began addressing a Jewish audience.

The seed once planted grew fast. To charges of anti-Semitism many Jews are highly susceptible. There are Jews, especially older people, who think of nothing else when they think of public affairs at all. To such people a single racist leaflet looks like the high road to Auschwitz. All sense of reality flies. That a few nameless impotent bigots scarcely constitutes a city-wide menace is not a convincing argument to people whose first retort would likely be that Hitler was once powerless too.

Official Jewish Leaders Now Cave In Meekly Under Growing Pressure

This susceptible Jewish element, turned in on itself and its historic fears, is a minority among Jews, but its anxieties were being daily inflated by the press, by television and by friends of friends of striking teachers. Most importantly there was scarcely anybody of repute in the city who wished to bring these panicky people back to reality. The mighty "liberals" of the trade unions did not tell them that the UFT was continually slurring black people. Instead the whole union movement supported the UFT and accepted Shanker's basic premise about the dangers of "reverse discrimination." The Democratic bosses sat back contentedly, for the more Jews turned against Lindsay, the silent apostle of decentralization, the better they liked it. Nor were Democratic legislators, themselves the creatures of the city machine, about to tell any Jewish constituents to cease becoming hysterical.

The decisive moment occurred when this tide of Jewish fears and hatred began exerting its inevitable pressure on the most illustrious Jewish organizations. These groups may make fussy pronouncements about national policies, but for all their political pretensions they are no more nor less than Jewish protective societies, mere ethnic mouthpieces. They had no means to resist the pressure. If their members wanted their fears confirmed, the menace certified, the villains denounced, then that is what the membership would get. One by one the Jewish organizations broke and accepted the lie of black anti-Semitism. When they did they confirmed its existence for thousands upon thousands of Jews previously untouched by Shanker's propaganda.

Why Powerful Political Elements Gave Shanker Their Support

What is more, having accepted Shanker's story, these Jewish spokesmen are permanently wed to it, for to tell the truth now would expose their complicity. The Anti-Defamation League is so completely under Shanker's thumb it is virtually his propaganda machine. And since the League is the official definer of anti-Semitism, Shanker's story is now an established "truth." Thanks to the hysteria built up this January, Mayor Lindsay no longer talks of "vicious slanders" against black people. He is too busy placating Jewish audiences with promises to put the black menace under control.

By turning his allegations into a truth, Shanker has now come in sight of his goal: the political isolation of the black people of the city and the consequent defeat of any real school decentralization plan.

Shanker, of course, could not accomplish this feat alone. It required the active cooperation and complicity of the trade union movement, their purlind "liberal" supporters and, most of all, the Democratic city machine and its minions, men like Judge Bloustein who termed Shanker's circulation of the leaflets "extremely unwise," as if it were merely a matter of poor judgment. Nor did Shanker win their cooperation because these leaders give a damn about school teachers. There was more to the defeat of decentralization than protecting the right of New York teachers never to be accountable to the public.

Decentralization means the establishment of locally elected school boards. It means the coming into municipal politics of locally elected officials who just might represent the citizens who elected them instead of the city rulers. It means, in other words, the exposure and destruction of the Democratic machine and with it the trade union leadership's loss of power over their workers, for that power depends on their workers being politically impotent and so incapable of being citizens. It means the seed of local democracy in New York and now we know who benefits from the lie of black anti-Semitism. Not only Albert Shanker, but every other petty tyrant protecting his power to lord it over somebody else. —Walter Karp, H. R. Shapiro

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