

## QUOTES

### **Bridges and Boundaries Revisited: African American and American Jews**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

I had lots of Jewish friends ... boys named Nathan and Sidney and Herman, and girls named Sonya and Bess and Leah ... These children of foreign-born parents were more democratic than native white Americans, and less anti-Negro.

—Langston Hughes on growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, ca. 1920

All of us Black people who lived in the neighborhood hated Jews, not because they exploited us, but because we had been taught at home and in Sunday School that Jews were "Christ killers."

—Richard Wright, *Black Boy*, 1945

How is it that the most famous black face singer in the world, Al Jolson, should be the son of a cantor? ... The son of a line of rabbis well knows how to sing the songs of the most cruelly wronged people in the world's history.

—*The Jewish Daily Forward*, 1928

When I was young, I was taught that being Jewish means ...  
You don't cross picket lines.  
You work for peace.  
You fight for social justice.  
You never forget the suffering of your people, a link to the suffering of others.  
You value learning and dialogue.

—Sabrina Virgo, Jesse Jackson supporter, 1988

Many whites of good will have accompanied us on our long journey for racial, social, and economic justice. None has matched the Jewish community as long-distance runners in the civil rights movement.

—Hugh P. Price, National Urban League keynote address, 1994

I never relate to myself as a white person because I'm not a Gentile; I'm a Jew.

—Sandra Bernhard in *Vibe* magazine, 1992

After seeing *Schindler's List*, I finally understood why some Jewish folk don't consider themselves "white." Forgive the lightbulb that went on over my dome but now I dig: The Holocaust didn't happen to white people, because the Nazis decided they weren't killing human beings when they killed Jews.

—Greg Tate, "Last Black Picture Show," *Village Voice*, 1994

As was—and still is— appropriate and efficient in the face of the legalized monolith of U.S. apartheid laws, Blacks and Jews focused frequently on their similarities, on the commonalities of the Holocaust and the Middle Passage, so incomparable in one sense yet so filled with the same unbounded mandate of never forgetting.

—Patricia Williams, "On Imagining Foes, Imagining Friendship," 1997

We are still victims of our respective experiences, they dominate our being, they shape our perceptions of virtually everything and everyone.

—Milton Morris, Forum on Black Jewish Relations, 1989

## II. SECTION: OUT OF BONDAGE

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of Bondage.

—Exodus 20:2

The Bible was the only form of literature the captive negroes could get at ... It was natural ... to find ... similarity between their condition and that of the enslaved Hebrews ... They saw their own history reflected in it.

—Paul Robeson, *The Jewish Tribune*, 1927

## III. SECTION: RACIALIZED BODIES: IMAGING THE OTHER

It is commonplace among biologists that characters of apparently the most trivial significance are precisely those which are of the greatest value as a means of classification, and it is on the degree of curliness or twist in the hair that the most fundamental divisions of the human race is based.

—W.J. Sollas, *Paleolithic Races and Their Modern Representatives*, 1912

Difference is that which threatens order and control; it is the polar opposite to our group ... that tension produces and anxiety that give shape to the Other.

—Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 1985

#### **IV. SECTION: A CALL TO ACTION: The Teens and Twenties**

Despised and oppressed through centuries, the Jews know what oppression means and consequently they have always been tender and sympathetic toward the Negroes who have been their companions in drinking the bitter dregs of race prejudice.

—*The Messenger*, an African-American newspaper, 1917

The situation of the Negroes in America is very comparable to the situation of the Jews ... in Russia. The Negro diaspora, the special laws ... the Negro hopes are very similar to those which we Jews lived through.

—*The Jewish Daily Forward*, 1917

#### **V. SECTION: FELLOW TRAVELLERS: The Thirties and Forties**

If Bolshevism can stop massacres of Jews in Russia—would it not be able to stop race riots and lynching in the United States?

—*The Messenger*, an African-American newspaper, 1928

All my life I'd been sweated and stepped on and Jim Crowed ... I lived in the worst section of town and rode behind the "Colored" signs of streetcars, as though there was something disgusting about me. I heard myself called "nigger" and "darky" and I had to say "Yes, sir" to every white man, whether he had my respect or not.

—Angelo Herndon, on joining the Communist Party, 1934

#### **VI. SECTION: FIGHTING INJUSTICE ABROAD AND AT HOME: World War II**

On a day in April [1945] I entered Buchenwald. There I saw the walking dead ... It made me see clearly what can happen when racism is left unchallenged. It removed my blinders ... I now understand that the pain of racism is not relegated just to me and mine ... your pain is my pain, and my pain is your pain.

— Leon Bass, African-American Concentration Camp Liberator,  
183rd Combat Engineer Battalion, ca. 1990

## VII. SECTION: THE GRAND ALLIANCE?: The Fifties and Sixties

There was some interaction of blacks and whites. I remember cooking some pinto beans—that's all we had—and everybody just got around the pot ... That was an experience just to see white people coming around the pot and getting a bowl and putting some stuff in and then sitting around talking ... We was sitting on the floor and they was talking and we was sitting there laughing, and I guess they became very human, we each to one another. It was an experience that will last a lifetime.

—Unita Blackwell, on Mississippi Freedom Summer, 19\_\_

The same white element that put Kennedy into power—labor, the Catholics, the Jews, and liberal Protestants ... joined the March on Washington. They didn't integrate it, they infiltrated it. And as they took it over, it lost its militancy.

—Malcolm X, 1963

As the Negro masses have become more active and more militant in their own interests, their feelings have forced themselves to the surface; and Jewish leaders—of unions, of defense and civil rights organizations—as well as businessmen, housewives, and homeowners, have been confronted for the first time with demands from Negro organizations that, they find, cannot serve as the basis of a common effort.

—Nathan Glazer, *Commentary*, 1964

## VIII. SECTION: THE WAKE OF THE SIXTIES

There was a time in American history when it was easier for blacks to regard Jews as brothers and sisters among the oppressed of the earth. However, with the rise in Jewish affluence and the Six-Day War the image of Jew as victim ceased to match the reality.

—Julius Lester, "The Simple Truth About Blacks and Jews," 1989

In general, though segments of the Jewish community have drifted to the right along with the rest of the country, Jews remain the most liberal group in the white population, far to the left of non-Jews in comparable economic and social circumstances. So why have blacks made such a point of singling out Jews for criticism?

—Ellen Willis, "The Myth of the Powerful Jew," 1979

## IX. CONCLUSION: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Thou shalt not stand idly by ...

—Leviticus 19:16

At first thought it may seem strange that the anti-Semite's outlook should be related to that of the Negrophobe. It was my philosophy professor ... who recalled the fact to me one day: "Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you" ... He meant, quite simply, an anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967

To me, Jewishness is not just a religion, it's a culture, and I come from that part of the culture that was oppressed, that connected its oppression with the oppression of everyone else, that developed an ethos and a theory around what it meant to be thrown out and disposed in the world. That's what it means to me to be Jewish.

—Sandy Lowe in *Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk About Race and Identity*, 1994

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. The Jewish travail occurred across the sea and America rescued him from the house of bondage. But America IS the house of bondage for the Negro, and no country can rescue him.

—James Baldwin, "Black Anti- Semitism and Jewish Racism," 1969

When I grew up in Chicago, when blacks were finally able to move out of the ghetto, the fact was that it was safe to move to Jewish neighborhoods. At worst, the Jews would simply move away. If we went to the white ethnic neighborhoods like Cicero, there was a real fear that we'd be stoned or killed or driven out. That's a big difference.

—Gordon Davis, former New York Parks Commissioner, ca. 1990

Jewish support of Black Americans ... has always transcended the dictates of political expediency.

—Coretta Scott King, 1979

I have a friend who tells me she was almost a teenager in her middle-class, heavily Jewish neighborhood before she found out the Yiddish word *Schwartzter* did not mean "maid" ... My friend said this to me as something of a personal confession, but I told her not to feel guilty. Looking back, I recalled I must have been almost a teenager before I found out the word "Jew" was not a verb meaning "to bargain," as in "Jew him down." That's how it was used in my neighborhood.

—Clarence Page, "Blacks and Jews: A Broken Marriage," 1996

My mother held up black anti-Semitism as further evidence of black people's unworthiness ... People who called us "devils" had to be bad. People who called us "bloodsuckers" had to be bad. People who called us "greedy Jews" had to be bad.

—Maurice Berger, *White Lies*, 1999

Racism is a bacterium, potentially curable, but now deadly; anti-Semitism is a virus, potentially deadly, but currently contained.

—Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "Blacks and Jews: Different Kinds of Survival," 1992

Without a sympathetic understanding of the deep historic sources of Jewish fears and anxieties about group survival, Blacks will not grasp the visceral attachment of most Jews to Israel. Similarly, without a candid acknowledgement of Black's status as permanent underdogs in American society, Jews will not comprehend what the symbolic predicament and literal plight of Palestinians in Israel means to Blacks.

—Cornel West, *Race Matters*, 1993