THE NARROW BRIDGE

Jewish Views on Multiculturalism

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Temple University Press, 1988); Louise Tilly and Patricia Gurin, eds., *Women, Politics and Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990); Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg, eds., *Women and Social Protest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). See also Celene Krauss, "Waste and Toxic Waste Protests: Race, Class and Gender as Resources of Resistance," paper presented at "A Celebration of Our Work," Douglass College, May 1993. *Bridges to Power: Women's Multicultural Alliances,* ed. Lisa Albrecht and Rose M. Brewer, published in cooperation with the National Women's Studies Association (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), offers essays and reports on coalition building and alliance building among contemporary women's groups. Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), was an early effort at case studies of a variety of locally based resistance movements.

Stayed on Freedom

Jew in the Civil Rights Movement and After

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Jew for Racial and Economic Justice?

Since early 1992 I've been working as director of a New York-based organization called Jews for Racial and Economic Justice. Several times at conferences or meetings, a typo has rendered my identification tag or program listing thus:

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When I began to write this essay, the peculiar, slightly mortifying label drifted back to me. That's how it would have been in the Civil Rights Movement, had we identified ourselves: *Jew for Racial and Economic Justice.* Individual. Alone. Even though there were rabbis, Jewish organizations, and thousands of Jews. More than half the white Freedom Riders. Nearly two-thirds of the white Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteers.[1] But we were neither organized nor visible as Jews.

I meet Debra Schultz for lunch. She is writing her dissertation on Jewish women in the Civil Rights Movement and has started to contact some women to interview. She reports that, when she phones, several of them ask, "Why are you focusing on *Jewish* women?" or announce, "My being Jewish had nothing to do with it."

Indeed, given that most of us operated without reference to our Jewishness, why insert this reference now? The answer comes at two levels. Most simply, then we had no language to discuss *identity.* We were Americans, we subdivided into Black and white, and our goal was to disrupt this division. Period. In the radical corner of the Civil

Rights Movement we knew that the right to sit at the lunch counter meant little without money for lunch; economics was part of our political agenda, but we rarely discussed our own class position or our differences from each other. Sexual orientation was never mentioned publicly and hardly ever privately. Gender, ethnicity, culture went unremarked, except for sexual innuendo, sometimes combined with a borderline-playful taunting, as when a male co-worker, a teenager like myself, sang me a Harlem version of the old Wobbly song on the bus returning from the 1963 March on Washington:

> Jew girls from Brooklyn they go wild over me
> And they hold my hand where everyone can see
> They paint their face like whores
> Have me leave them at their doors
> They go wild, simply wild over me.

What could one do in response to such a song? I dissociated. I vowed not to be like those others. It seems important to note that while anti-white sentiment was freely spoken, this song was the extent of anti-Semitism that I heard or remembered in the Civil Rights Movement.[2]

The Civil Rights Movement called for undivided focus on what seemed the primary contradiction of our society. Initially *black and white together* represented, for Jews, one more permutation of the universalism we had been encountering and articulating for several generations in communist, socialist, and liberal thought; for Jews, the emphasis on common humanity, at least in earlier generations, dovetailed neatly with the pressures of anti-Semitism, both external and internalized. Univeralism had quietly promised an escape from anti-Semitism. I did not hear or need this promise, for I had been raised in the strongly Jewish neighborhood of Flatbush on its assumption (*all men are brothers* [sic]).

Now, on the contrary, universalism sallies forth from the armory of sophisticated racists, while progressives share a discourse of inclusive history, and of politics grounded in identity. These require categories. Now we ask who did what when in which combinations, a questioning popularized by the Civil Rights project of locating the history of African Americans. But the questioning could not stop

there, and as other people of color, feminists, queers, and ethnics followed the leadership and inspiration of African Americans—with varying degrees of recognition of intellectual and political debt—we have returned to the site of events and movements to comb them for our past.

So, too, Jews. To bring into focus the often invisible presence and explore its significance. Why were Jews drawn to the Civil Rights Movement in such numbers? What did Jewish participation mean for the movement? (Indeed, what did white participation mean? What about those neither Black nor white?) Did Jewish participation add strength to the movement, or mostly offer important experience to our individual selves? How can we value that experience without being nostalgic? Are there lessons for Jewish progressives today? Finally, what are we doing with the experience gleaned in the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties?

To explore Jewish participation in the Civil Rights Movement assumes that Jewish identity is significant; such significance has not, in progressive movements, been a given. (My being *Jewish* had nothing to do with it.) Most important, this quest is linked to concern about tensions—real and media-hyped—between Jews and African Americans. Progressive Jews seek a positive history and models. Some seek understanding of what went sour, became problematic. Some—I am monitoring my own work for this impulse, but it is cunning—seek credit.

And some work to challenge those Jews who explain with great show of reason and maturity why their earlier radical politics have now shifted. We want to contradict their claim to speak for all of us. To place this history in a context of a responsible present and a vision for the future. We aim to recreate a new mass movement for civil and human rights in which Jews contribute forcefully, and we want to know how to do it right.

Most Jews—need it be said?—were not active in Civil Rights; it's only in comparison with other whites that we look so progressive. In the sixties, the complex swirling of Jewish history, ethics, bigotry, and—for some—a family tradition of antiracist activism created a pressure that some Jews responded to and others ignored.[3] Years after her work in the movement, Civil Rights activist Marilyn Lowen wrote, *we went to Mississippi to spit in Hitler's eye.*[4] Yes—though I thi few of us did so consciously. Many Jews raised in the United States in the wake of the Holocaust experienced it like a family secret—hovering, controlling, but barely mentioned except in code or casual reference. In the early sixties I doubt even Marilyn fully grasped the Jewish content of her commitment.

Harlem Education Project, 1963–65

In June 1963 the Harlem Education Project (HEP), a branch of the Northern Student Movement (NSM), itself the Northern arm of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), put out a call for students interested in tutoring Harlem schoolchildren. I was seventeen.

At that first orientation meeting, I was assigned a block unit and a student to tutor. Stokeley Carmichael (later Kwame Toure) spoke on the evils of racism and how together we would fight it, interspersed with jokes about blue-eyed devils. All the white people, myself included (I have blue eyes), laughed nervously, but I was thrilled to be hearing the movement's most radical vision. Coordinators for the various HEP projects described their work. They were Black and white, including a sprinkling of what was then to me an unknown quantity: upper-class WASPs. Lew Anthony, African American from Philadelphia, explained the science project, including a trip to Maine for kids on "the block" to watch the approaching solar eclipse, using a protective apparatus the kids were building under his direction. ("The Block" was 144th between 7th and 8th, where a lot of HEP community activities were centered.) Kathy Rogers, the tutorial project director, was a tall upper-class WASP from Sarah Lawrence. Roger Siegel, a Jewish college dropout, headed Community Organizing. Lew's brother Carl, an architecture student, showed plans for the community park he'd designed with block residents. Then Carl and Rufus (editor of the HEP newsletter) talked about class differences in the Black community. Finally Carl and Rufus led us in singing "This Little Light of Mine" and "Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom."

That meeting was the most compelling event so far in my young life. The diversity of the Black community, the vision of the community park, the energy, the swell of voices as we sang together. . . .

Where were the African American women? Harlem was full of strong activist women, in the neighborhoods and churches, soon in the schools, as parents and HEP worked together to demand Black history, organize school boycotts, and create freedom schools. Miz Addie, who owned (or ran?) the candy store with the back room where I later taught reading was "typical": a grandmother, tough as traffic—the kids obeyed even her whisper. Young African American women came to Harlem to work with HEP, but the young women in the neighborhood stood back. The wildly cross-racial sexual energy of the Civil Rights Movement mostly meant white women paired up with Black men, a dynamic that can't have helped foster much sisterhood.[5] The other direction (Black women, white men) was burdened with a history of rape and sexual exploitation and a present of race-*and*-gender dominance, though, again, we had language for none of this.

That summer I attended every meeting, volunteered for every work shift, borrowed tattered paperbacks—Baldwin, Marx, SDS Manifestos—and brought them back the next day asking for more. I taught math to a fifteen-year-old named Yvonne, who brought at least two friends to each session and quit after a couple of weeks. I did better with the teenage boys (today I can read the sexual politics in that too) and the children. Sammy, with blue eyes and gap teeth, was another teenager, utterly pragmatic. He needed to learn to read and write in order to send letters to businesses to get donations for his baseball team. With that motivation, teaching was easy. Next I began working with preschoolers, with word cards and texts created from their stories, using principles developed in *Teacher* by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, the white New Zealander who had taught Maori children. The Civil Rights Movement was profoundly connected to education.

Weekends I'd show up to haul garbage from the inner-block lot which, under Carl's direction, was becoming a community park. I handed out leaflets for rent strikes, licked envelopes, and helped organize for the 1963 March on Washington. I helped Mrs. Reed, an elderly woman from Barbados, create a block library in her front room; twice a week we drank tea together, along with whatever family had dropped by. My next student was her five-year-old grandson, George.

For me, a teenager entering the world of Harlem in the early sixties, being Jewish *meant* being white, meant being called "blue-eyed devil"—tinged [illegible] anger, or even mild affection—by Stokeley or by the Black Muslims hawking *Muhammed Speaks* on 135th and Lenox (now Malcolm X Avenue). It never occurred to me that Muslims and Jews shared a non-Christian status in this country, or that Jews might have a sustaining culture like the Black Baptist Church. In HEP we talked a lot about Marx, a little about Jesus. No one ever mentioned that both were Jews.

Today it's shocking to realize that I, a white girl from Brooklyn, handed out flyers for rent strikes and not one person said, at least not in my presence, *Who the fuck is she to tell us what to do?* Current assumptions about organizing are predominantly separatist. We're accustomed to groups organized by identity rather than by political principles, though recent AIDS organizing is a notable exception, reaching across racial and often class lines to transform issues of health care, immigration, and housing.[6] Still the mixed group is the exception.

But Civil Rights organizations *were* mixed. Ideas of *separatism, privilege, arrogance, trust, rage* were already explosive. Malcolm X held far more appeal than Dr. King for the well-under-thirties who comprised HEP. The prevailing ideology was *black and white together*, but there were a lot of edgy grain-of-truth jokes, and in 1965 I didn't need Stokeley's proclamation of Black Power to know it was time for me to leave Harlem. This was not about fear or anti-white sentiment; I was running a reading workshop and I could not give the children what they needed, because they needed Black teachers. I had come to understand something about separatism, dignity, autonomy. A few years later, when I encountered women's liberation, this grasp of separatism served me well, though it would be yet another few years before I came, again, to see critical play between separatist strategy and a coalition model. First I had to see how dangerously small our focus would shrink: mass movement to smaller movements to support groups.

Jew Girl from Brooklyn

I had been raised on stories of labor struggles, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Spanish Civil War, the voice of Paul Robeson, Eleanor Roosevelt's resignation from the DAR because they refused to let Marian Anderson perform in their hall. When news of the contemporary Negro (we said then) struggle for equality reached me, I had been waiting for it all my life.

I entered the movement as a seventeen-year-old, naively full of all I had to offer poor oppressed Black people. Like a lot of young whites, Jewish and not, I brought an unexamined empathy with oppression. Some of this was parental teaching: the Holocaust; the picket line. And some of what attracted me was my own sense of powerlessness; my parents meant to raise us by the Spock-bible, but in practice they were often abusive. The Civil Rights Movement allowed me to export my rage and misery onto African Americans, so I could feel privileged (accurately and inaccurately) and could (generously, not selfishly) fight for justice—not for myself, but *for them*.

That was the initial impulse; but the people I encountered were far too vital and complex, the energy swirling in Harlem far too dynamic. I learned, first and fast, my own ignorance; that what I had to offer was a willingness to work hard. I learned to divest myself of the superiority that always girds pity. And I learned what Harlem had to offer me: a vision of collective possibility and the transforming opportunity to participate.

This impulse was complex—partly about vision and values, and partly about snobbery and class mobility.[7] In the Civil Rights Movement, I could escape Flatbush, my parents' clothing store, the world of working- and lower-middle-class Jews, a world I thought of as *materialistic*. Despite my intimate knowledge of class range in the Jewish community, including in my own extended family, my measuring sticks quickly became the poorest neighborhoods in Harlem. Against *materialistic* stood the world of struggle and change—I didn't say *revolution* yet—along with beatniks, sex, poetry, art, folk music, soul, and funk. Every day I watched my parents leave our Brooklyn apartment to take the subway to work and return home drained, and I, with my seventeen-year-old energy, vowed to live differently. I believed I was confronting my parents' hypocrisy; in truth, I was also punishing them. These were their values? Then I would live these values, scorn their inability or unwillingness to do the same. Evidence of their racism filled me with contempt: *they were fakes and I was real.*

It took twenty years before I understood that my rebellion had been enacted simultaneously by thousands of young Jews; that it was in fact a collective Jewish rebellion, articulated in a classically Jewish fashion. As Trotsky's master biographer Isaac Deutscher explained "the non-Jewish Jew" to the World Jewish Congress in 1958: "The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition."[8]

What did I know of Jewish? Only that it was the norm. I knew nothing about Jewish culture, religion, or history that could sustain or inspire me. Nothing that taught me my yearnings came partly *from* it. My parents' most admirable friends, Communists and fellow travelers, virtually all Jewish, seemed to me "non-Jewish." My family were not synagogue-goers, and when I, at thirteen, in quest of meaning attended shul on Rosh Hashanah, I saw people flaunting their new clothes. What I knew of religion seemed formulaic, empty, and much too connected with material well-being: the cost of synagogue membership, tickets for services, Hebrew school, the ostentatious plaques and seats reserved for the *makhers*. I found no ethical content. It seemed as if those who spoke as Jews were often politically conservative and religious; *politically conservative* and *religious* were yoked in my mind—I knew nothing of Stephen Wise, Abraham Heschel, or other progressive rabbis.[9]

Recently I was speaking to a Jewish group on Jewish-African American relations, and a man raised the issue of gratitude. Why weren't *they* grateful for *our* help in the Civil Rights Movement? I resisted asking him if he himself had actually worked for Civil Rights, and answered more kindly than I felt (I've learned how effective kindness can be) that you'd expect gratitude only if you thought of yourself as having done a favor. And I went on to say what is perfectly true, that I myself felt grateful for the opportunity to work in the Civil Rights Movement.

Later, I relayed this exchange to a friend, also a long-time activist, who cracked, "Yeah, and I feel grateful to the Vietnamese for . . . ," illuminating the absurdity and the danger. My opportunity came from extreme suffering: it is possible to colonize even a liberation movement if its main use seems to be the growth—even the political growth—of supporters protected by the same privilege that allowed us to choose whether and how we might participate in the struggle. So while I know I was also fighting for my freedom, the legacy I responsibly derive from my work in Harlem must honor the specificity of that movement, as well as its far-ranging implications; that is, to maintain also an unswerving commitment to the liberation of African Americans.

Post–Civil Rights: Berkeley in the Late 1960s

In a post–free speech, burgeoning, antiwar-movement Berkeley, bereft of the movement that had been my life, I turned from a committed organizer into one among the masses. I showed up, I marched, I raged against our government, and I saw what I had learned in Harlem about racism and capitalism confront New Left/hippie culture. But I had little sense of community, and my energy and skills were never tapped.

The Civil Rights Movement, especially in its emphasis on education and community building, had drawn on the less public skills—ability to communicate, build trust, encourage, and persist. In contrast, the antiwar movement operated in a top-decibel way I now understand as quintessentially masculinist. To mobilize young American males against the war meant depicting antiwar resistance as more macho than doing battle. White male radicals tried to emulate the tough, militarist stance of African American radicals like H. Rap Brown and Huey Newton. In Oakland, Black Panthers fought the domestic version of anti-imperial struggle waged by the Vietnamese abroad. The antiwar movement mirrored male heterosexual fantasy liberation. There were certainly pacifists in the antiwar movement, but in Berkeley they were mostly outshouted. There were even a few women leaders, but they were either "exceptions" (women who sounded/postured like men) or they were fucking important men. Lesbians—and gay men—were severely closeted.

I had no important male lover. I was not confident or articulate. Not until Women's Liberation did I find myself as a leader (and as a lesbian). I accepted instruction from Black militants that we were not needed in Black communities; we were needed in white communities to struggle with white people, our own people, about racism. But the thought never crossed my mind that, for me, this might mean struggling with Jews.

Why not? Partly it was the times, the New/White Left's rigid polarization of young against old: Who in their early twenties wanted to engage politically with the community they grew up in—their parents, aunts, uncles, neighbors? It was the exact opposite of sexy.

But in addition, I barely thought of myself as a Jew. In June 1967 the Six-Day War broke out, and an occupying army marched inexorably through the lives of Palestinians and Israelis, shaping those lives to this day. For many, Jewish consciousness soared as a result of perceived Israeli vulnerability/strength. African American activists, invoking African unity and third world alliance against Europe, identified with Palestinians. I may as well have been in a coma for all I remember. I barely noticed the '67 War.[10]

Today I'm ashamed: What kind of a Jew was I?

The answer is instructive: *That's the kind of Jew I was.* The kind who didn't identify with other Jews. Who didn't feel afraid, ashamed, joyful, grieving, according to the fate and/or behavior of Jews. Who didn't see Jews as "my people." I was oblivious to the way others responded to me as a Jew. I didn't understand that however I thought about or related to my identity and my history, I could no more walk free of these than I could be genderless. Nor did I notice that those who spoke as white radicals were also often Jewish. Not until I became conscious of myself as a Jew. Not until I understood at some gut level that there was no escape.

On the other hand, in that preidentity era, I almost didn't think of myself as a woman—at least not politically. The first time I heard a woman claim that women were oppressed, I was outraged—not, as you might think, at the oppression, but at the claim. *I had worked in Harlem. Didn't I know* real *oppression? What were these middle-class white women trying to claim?* (Did I know their class? As it turned out, I was dead wrong about some of them. Could I assume they were all white? I was wrong about that, too.)

And I remember a woman in a Shakespeare seminar I attended briefly (we were almost always on strike in those days, so class attendance, at least on campus, was a sporadic affair). She was offering what I now would call a feminist critique of Christopher Marlowe, and though there is no Elizabethan more ripe for a feminist critique, I was mortified. She was talking about her *feelings*. Her voice was loud. And, though I didn't register this consciously at the time, her accent was *New York Jew*.

Loud Pushy Jewish Women

In women's liberation, in Portland, Oregon, in the early seventies, I began to learn about anti-Semitism and to claim my Jewish identity, though these were two disparate acts. I was teaching, and the experience of reading Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*—

selected initially because of its discussion of language—with a class of goyish first-year students caught me up short. After that, I made a point of including at least one Jewish text each semester. Yet at the first Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs, Ohio, in 1975, when I overheard women on the lunch line mention the Jewish caucus, I tuned out. I didn't even eavesdrop.

I was absorbed in the fabulousness of being a woman and, as I wrote, *when I became a lesbian and no longer cared what men thought, I came into my power.*[11] Strength and pushiness were suddenly desirable in women. Amy Kesselman, a founder of Chicago Women's Liberation, has suggested that the very character traits that women's liberation had validated and freed were, well, Jewish—at least a certain kind of Jewish.[12] For a woman to be urban, sharp-tongued, intellectual, tough, and pushy was suddenly a hit—in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles. . . .

The greater Diaspora was more problematic for Jewish women. And as feminists translated our practice from a gender-mixed environment to a female space in which we were supposed to be genetically supportive, cooperative, and gentle—entirely different from men—there was an assumption that, among women, we wouldn't need our strength. The evolving feminist ethic—noninterruptive, nonconfrontational, nonargumentative—made some of us feel like we were on the wrong planet, subjected to unfamiliar forces of gravity.

As feminists of color challenged white hegemony, they created a model and articulated a rationale that also helped Jews understand exclusion. Collectivizing our experiences of "wrongness," we began to grasp that the "normal" feminist was not only white and middle-class: she was determinedly Christian. Sometimes what was said about whites fit us and sometimes it didn't;[13] yet often when Jews voiced our differences (for example, Were *we* afraid of anger? Could *we* expect to see *our* culture taught in the public schools?) white Christian women responded as though we were trying to wiggle out of something. But the "religious" category into which we—if mentioned at all—were usually crammed, was an uneasy fit for what we often perceived as vast cultural, historical, and sometimes physical differences. Everything split into white/color, European/third world dichotomies (the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict only underscored this polarization), while feminist radicals inhaled and exhaled assumptions of Jewish wealth and privilege, just like everyone else in North America.

Today there are [illegible]ives, Jewish and not, who respond to the work of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice with a, usually unvoiced, attitude: *What are you trying to get away with? Why are you harping on an insignificant category? It's one thing if you're religious (although how could you be, all that patriarchy), but aren't you just evading your white skin and (assumed) class privilege? Aren't you avoiding the implications of whiteness?*[14]

Holy Songs

Today as I'm writing, the psalm-based song pops into my head:

By the waters of Babylon where we lay down and wept
when we remembered Zion . . .
The wicked carried us into captivity, required of us a song.
How can I sing a holy song in a strange land?

Holy and whole stem from the same root: *halig*. By the waters of Babylon—the Willamette, the Columbia River Gorge, the Rio Grande, the Chama, the Ogunquit, Penobscot Bay, the Winooski—where Jews were scarce, I began to comprehend my estrangement. How I monitored my accent, curbed my gestures. I was not whole. Women had problems with "my style"; I certainly had trouble with theirs. But I barely knew what Babylon meant to the Jews, or Zion either. I could articulate almost nothing about Jewish history, culture, or tradition. I knew no Jewish songs. "My" holy songs came from the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1980, living in Santa Fe, I began to gather with other Jewish women. Began to learn, to teach one another. To write the essay that became part of *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*, a collection that made Jews visible in the lesbian and feminist movement, to non-Jews and, most significantly, to each other.[15] I joined New Jewish Agenda, founded in 1981 to voice Jewish perspectives on the Left and Left concerns among Jews.[16]

Today a number of groups are building on the principle of explicitly Jewish progressive activism. In Seattle, the African American-Jewish Coalition for Justice offers one model; Jews for Racial and Economic Justice in New York, another; Jewish participation in coalitions against homophobic and anti-immigrant ballot measures, a

third. In Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Portland, and Detroit, Jews have begun to organize explicitly Jewish antiracist groups.[17]

Why now, and not then? When progressive Jews are silent as Jews, we permit the more conservative voices in the Jewish community to speak for all of us, thereby strengthening conservatism and alienating progressive Jews from Jewish community, culture, continuity, and history.

I'm reminded of a harsh Jewish joke.

> Two Jews walk down the street chatting.
>
> "Don't look now," says the first Jew, "We're being followed." And indeed, two anti-Semites—Nazis, Klan, skinheads, take your pick—follow close behind. They begin to call names, make threats.
>
> "I'm going to confront them," says the second Jew, "I'm going to tell them to shut up."
>
> "Shhh," says the first Jew. "They're together and we're alone."

I tell this joke to make a point not about anti-Semites, but about Jewish conservatives—either the minority of ultraorthodox Jews who are, unfortunately, also ultraorganized, or those Jews, mostly male and wealthy, who claim to speak on behalf of the Jewish community but represent only the interests of the privileged—for whom economic survival, the struggle to obtain decent health care, schooling, the safety of women and children (*their* women and children always excepted) are of no concern, or do not resonate with sufficient urgency to place these issues where they belong, at the top of the Jewish and every other agenda.

This is the *they* in my application of the bitter Jewish joke. Powerful conservative Jews act together and we—progressive Jews—feel and act alone. *Jew for Racial and Economic Justice?*

I know there are some—even many—progressive Jews, who feel uncomfortable or disconnected around this sort of discussion, which assumes the desirability of reclaiming Jewish identity. *I don't feel like that at all. It wasn't about being Jewish.* I'm often stunned by this lack of connection, until I remember who I was in 1967 and why.

I've learned that I can often bond with these Jews in practice, as we work together in various coalitions. They usually turn out to be appreciative of an outspokenly progressive Jewish presence, and happy to identify with the tradition of Jewish progressive activism. Especially hungry for this history are young Jews, confronted by campus anti-Semitism and surrounded by identity politics; for them the double identity of Jewish/progressive is critical.

I know there are also Jews with whom I disagree vehemently on such issues as racism in the Jewish community, strategies to combat anti-Semitism, solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I see the fear that dogs them, the perception of any anti-Semitism as potential extermination; often they are convinced that no one will look out for our interests, and they refuse to be suckered again by looking out for others. *"They" hate us; why should we care about "them"? We made it, why can't "they"?* Here, *they* are, usually, African Americans. Or, as in *"they" want to drive us into the sea*—Palestinians, Arabs. The controlling worldview: bleak, survivalist.

Yet we can often bond over our concern for Jewish survival, our love of Jewish culture. Our common ground often provides a bridge of—at least—mutual respect. We encounter each other at an exhibit on Ethiopian Jewish culture, at a klezmer performance, in shul. Allies in the mainstream Jewish community invite us in to address and discuss our differences, and we find these differences are not always as vast as we'd imagined: the Jews who stayed home have not necessarily stood still.

I Have a Dream

Not like Dr. King's long-range dream of a free nation, but a short-term vision of how to move toward that dream.

In my dream, to meet the palpable nightmare of a growing Christian fundamentalist right wing, a new Civil Rights/human rights movement emerges from the separate movements into which the sixties and seventies dwindled. The smaller movements still function as community or issue-bases, as channels between each community and the larger movement, but the larger movement can *MOVE* like a mighty wave. Maybe there's an African American wing of the movement, a Latino wing, a First Nation wing, an Asian wing, and all the other people of color, but more, crisscrossing there's a labor wing, and a wing of the movement for nonunionized workers, queers, feminists, youth, a health care wing, AIDS activists and women's health activists, teachers, environmental groups, homeless people, immigrant rights:

all the ways that people are organized for freedom and justice come together. In this movement, rape, environmental racism, and poverty are deemed crimes against humanity. Housing and food, health care, and education are considered basic human rights.

As this movement pushes and bumbles toward the world we want, Jews form one wing. We are not segregated; like others, we participate also in all the appropriate places where our multiple identities and concerns lead us. But Jews in this new movement know and are proud of our history. We continually reach out to other Jews, to hear their concerns and share our perspectives. We argue, very Jewishly, with our families, our friends, our co-workers, Jewish and non-Jewish. Our leaders are not all Ashkenazi men in suits who belong to a synagogue. We recognize and embrace our diversity of race, culture, sexual orientation, observance, and secularism. Ladino and Yiddish are valued with Hebrew, and Ladino is valued also as a bridge with other Spanish-speaking cultures. Women are key figures, lesbians and gay men and bisexuals, mothers, young Jews, old Jews, workers and poor Jews, artists and writers. Jews of color lead toward alliances with the communities they span. The coalition work between Israeli and Palestinian women, and the pressure it continues (in my dream) to exert toward completion of the project of Palestinian liberation, is an honored model of feminist leadership and of radical boundary crossing. We bond with Japanese and other Asians against the use of the term "Jap," and against any *model-minority-we-made-it-why-can't-they* cooptation; we bond with Muslims and other non-Christians against Christian hegemony. We recognize the leadership of African Americans in progressive struggle, but we do not imagine that the issues of other communities of color, and of all working or impoverished people, are magically included under the category of African American. We are not obsessed with being liked by African Americans, but rather with contributing our part to create the world where untainted human relations will be possible. We form a human chain of commitment between those able or willing to give money or time, those who risk their careers or freedom, and those who risk their lives. We comprehend the process whereby activists edge and are edged toward greater commitment, greater and greater risk.

In this movement Jews understand white skin privilege. We understand that some of us have it and some don't, that some of us have it sometimes [illegible] We know what it is and what it is not. We know it is not liberation. We oppose absolutely assimilation, cultural loss, and devaluing. We know that passing can confer safety, but also signifies loss. We are not willing to settle for being white in America. We want more. We want to abolish racism, to abolish the political significance of the categories *white* and *color*.

In this movement, Jews are visible. Non-Jews know that Jews are not whites/Europeans who go to Jewish church, but a people whose history, culture/religion, and sometimes complexion situate us shiftingly between the categories of white and color. Non-Jews know and respect the history of Jewish oppression and resistance, of Jewish allies. Through our crisscrossing identities, friend- and loverships, families, and concerns, and most of all through the political change that we accomplish together, we come to trust the power and the transfiguring joy of solidarity.

Finally, this movement is a singing movement, like the one that first taught me to keep my mind stayed on freedom. In my dream we sing and teach one another to sing our holy songs in this strange land, transforming it from strangeness.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Marla Brettschneider for the initial sparking interest and for extraordinary patience; and to Nancy Ordover and Debra Schultz for incisive and generous critical response, which strengthened this work immeasurably. I am of course responsible for whatever weaknesses remain.

Notes

1. Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 93. According to Debra Schultz, doctoral student at the Union Institute for Graduate Studies, historical research on Jews in the Civil Rights Movement is in such a nascent state that reliable statistics for broader Civil Rights activity—in the North, for example—are hard to come by.

2. I may have missed something—I was young and had virtually no experience with anti-Semitism—but clearly it was not a dominant theme.

3. Nancy Ordover, doctoral student in Ethnic Studies at University of California–Berkeley, has drawn my attention to Mark Naison's term "cultural reflex." In his distinguished study *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), in an appendix ("Black-Jewish Relations in the Harlem Communist Party"), Naison offers the following intriguing remark: "Though their Jewish ancestry may have endowed them with cultural reflexes that dictated a strong emotional response to black oppression, and though as individuals they may have been aware of this, the assimilationist atmosphere in the Party, as well as their own political ambitions, probably discouraged them from calling attention to it in any systematic way" (p. 322; notes, p. 327). Considering that many Jewish Civil Rights activists *were* these Jewish Communists (by then, often, ex-Communists) or their children, the concept of "cultural reflex" seems worth exploring.

4. Marilyn, a Jew from Detroit, was, with Bob Fletcher (an African American, also from Detroit), my block leader during my first summer in Harlem.

5. In the mid-seventies, a white feminist talking with Alice Walker explained, with practically criminal innocence, how she had trouble with Black women though never with Black men. "That's because you didn't have trouble with the men," Walker responded. "If you'd had more trouble with the men, you would have had less trouble with the women." Interview published in the Eugene, Oregon *Women's Press*, paraphrased here from memory.

6. I am indebted to Nancy Ordover for this observation. As this book goes to press, California organizing for immigrant rights and affirmative action also exemplifies multicultural, issue-based politics.

7. Jewish students who participated in the Civil Rights Movement are usually assumed to have been economically privileged. This may have been true of many who went south, for obvious reasons: there were expenses—at the very least, a summer not spent working and saving for the school year. My memory of most whites/Jews in HEP was that they attended private colleges, had spent time in Europe, had access to cars, luxury apartments, and so on. But of course I was envious; I probably missed noticing others like myself. A class analysis of Civil Rights (and New Left) activists might challenge some stereotypes.

8. "Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Freud . . . all went beyond the boundaries of Jewry. They all found Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting. . . . Yet I think that in some ways they were very Jewish indeed. . . . As Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures" (Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* [London: Oxford University Press, 1968], pp. 26–27). Typically the non-Jewish Jew fails to see herself or himself as acting within the Jewish tradition. Deutscher's essay is a must-read, though distressingly blithe in its analysis of anti-Semitism.

9. There were no women rabbis yet. Today I wonder what might have been the impact on me of contemporary feminist rabbis such as Susan Talve, whose St. Louis congregation is engaged in a range of inventive grassroots antiracist work.

10. Yet fifteen years later, when Israel invaded Lebanon, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza—a direct result of the war I hadn't noticed—was already a central preoccupation. See "The Next Step" and "I've Been to Israel and to Palestine" in *The Issue Is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence and Resistance*, ed. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1992).

11. "Some Notes on Jewish Lesbian Identity," reprinted in ibid., p. 83.

12. Remarks on "Organizing in the Post-Holocaust Era" Panel at *In Gerangl* / In Struggle: 100 Years of Progressive Jewish History, Teach-In and Cultural Festival, Cooper Union, New York City, December 12, 1993; this event was organized by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and cosponsored by the *Village Voice*.

13. The experience of Jewish women varied widely, in accordance with our sense of identity, vulnerability, history, and so on.

14. For example, in 1990 an essay of mine was rejected from a feminist anthology

on fighting racism because, according to one source, "I didn't deal enough with whiteness." (Never mind that I analyzed and advocated deeply Jewish imperatives for struggling against racism.)

15. Evelyn Beck's editorship and the soliciting of the anthology from her by Persephone's Gloria Greenfield deserve historical credit. The reading given in Boston when *Nice Jewish Girls* came out (pun intentional) was an astonishing event. Hundreds of Jewish women shrieked, clapped, and stomped when I suggested we reclaim the terms "loud and pushy." And some picketing Orthodox Jewish men leafleted the crowd, claiming that we, the lesbians, were excommunicated.

16. New Jewish Agenda's impact, especially on Middle East peace work, was significant and undercredited. NJA also organized explicitly Jewish political work on Central America, feminism, homophobia, racism, and economic justice.

17. Women's leadership in all of these is noteworthy.

Black, White, and Red

Jewish and African Americans in the Communist Party

GERALD HORNE

It should come as no surprise that both Jewish and African Americans would be attracted to radical movements generally and to the Communist Party in particular. Those who feel the most pain scream the loudest; and those in search of an echo chamber to magnify the sound of their screams historically have veered toward movements for socialism that have put forward the theory that it is the "god of profit" that undergirded the evil of discrimination. Interestingly enough, radicals of varying stripes have argued for years that, ultimately, it was discrimination itself that helped split the working class and kept erstwhile natural allies in mortal combat.[1]

In this essay I put forward the idea that the U.S. Left and the Communist Party pioneered in the fight against racism and anti-Semitism and in building an alliance between Jewish and African Americans. I argue further that this Black-Jewish alliance reached a zenith in 1943 when Ben Davis, an African American Communist, was elected to the New York City Council with substantial Jewish support. I argue also that such electoral successes helped inspire a massive Red Scare that followed the conclusion of World War II, and that this effort to discredit and destroy the Left created favorable conditions for the rise of narrow nationalism and xenophobia in both the Black and Jewish communities; it is this dual narrow nationalism that has led directly to the present crisis in racial relations generally and in Black-Jewish relations particularly.[2]

The triumphalism of the West that has marked the end of the Cold War has not been able to obscure the fact that its proponents often heavily relied on narrow nationalism in order to subdue class-based alliances.[3] In Guyana, the English-speaking nation on the northern coast of South America, conflict was stoked deliberately