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Mixed Messages: A Study Of The Relationship  
Between Jesse Jackson And The American Jewish Community

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Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment  
Of The Requirements For Ordination

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## Digest

Since he entered the national spotlight in 1979 the Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson has significantly influenced black/Jewish relations in America. This thesis examines the relationship between Jesse Jackson and the American Jewish community between Autumn 1979 and Winter 1994.

Jesse Jackson was born in Greenville, South Carolina in 1941. Growing up in the South, Jackson despised the laws of segregation that branded black men and women as second class citizens. In the late 1950's and early 1960's Jackson got caught up in the fight for desegregation and civil rights. Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jackson decided to devote his life to improving the lives of blacks in America.

As a leader in the African-American community Jesse Jackson infuriated American Jews in 1979 when he held them responsible for Andrew Young's forced resignation as Ambassador to the United Nations. This incident unleashed a wave of repressed anti-Jewish sentiment in the public arena. The Jewish media castigated Jackson for his assertions. Jews accused Jackson of trying to poison tenuous black/Jewish relations.

Again in 1984, as a Presidential candidate, Jackson exacerbated tense black/Jewish relations when he referred to Jews as "Hymies" and New York City as "Hymietown." His associations with the Nation of Islam leader, Louis Farrakhan, caused bitter divisions between the two communities. Jews accused Jackson of being anti-Semitic. Blacks believed Jews were



trying to sabotage Jackson's bid for the presidency. Bitter disputes took place in the media.

When Jackson addressed the Democratic National Convention during the summer of 1984 Jackson responded to the divisions that his campaign had caused. He urged blacks and Jews to reconcile their differences. Most members of the American-Jewish community refused to trust Jackson. Many believed that his call for reconciliation was merely a media ploy.

Throughout his 1988 campaign for the presidency Jackson could not escape media scrutiny of his relationship with the American-Jewish community. He reached out to the Jewish voters that he had alienated in 1984. Jews remained skeptical of Jackson's olive branch. Most felt that they could not trust him. The refusal of many Jews to forgive Jackson for his 1984 indiscretions, contributed to increasing tensions between blacks and Jews in the public arena.

Since 1988 Jackson has continued to reach out to American Jews. He has denounced anti-Semitism on numerous occasions. He has urged blacks and Jews to come together as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel did during the height of the civil rights era. Yet Jews have been slow to respond to Jackson's pleas. Many are still suspicious of his motivations.

Yet there are some Jews who have welcomed Jesse Jackson's change into a more moderate black leader. When tensions erupt between African-Americans and Jewish-Americans Jackson is often called to help diffuse



the situation. Today he continues to speak out against racism and anti-Semitism. This thesis examines Jackson's transformation.



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## Introduction

Since he entered the national spotlight in the late 1970's, as a spokesman for members of the African-American community, the Reverend Jesse Jackson has spread fear in the hearts of much of the American-Jewish community. Many Jews have been unsure what to make of his remarks. When he announced that he was sick and tired about hearing of the Holocaust Jews were outraged. When he embraced PLO leader Yasir Arafat and worked closely with the head of the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan, Jews felt a deep pain. When he referred to Jews in New York as "Hymies" Jews branded him anti-Semitic.

Jackson's rhetoric has deeply impacted tense black/Jewish relations. A role model in the black community, Jews have questioned if Jackson has used his influence among African-Americans to spread unsavory messages about Jews. Jackson's entry into the 1984 and 1988 Presidential races assured media scrutiny of issues that divided members of the African-American and Jewish-American communities. Tensions between Jackson and Jews in the public arena seemed to heighten tensions between other blacks and Jews.

In recent years Jackson has toned down his Jewish rhetoric. He has tried to reach out to members of the American-Jewish community in order to strengthen black/Jewish cooperation. Today when Jackson speaks to Jewish groups he advocates a rebuilding of the black/Jewish partnership



that existed during the civil rights era. He seeks to relieve tensions between blacks and Jews. Jackson's remarks in the December 25, 1992 issue of the Baltimore Jewish Times illustrate this point. He commented, "when conflicts arise our leadership must turn to each other, not on each other, and work to heal those rifts..."



## Chapter I

### Jackson: Witness To A Black/Jewish Alliance

The Reverend Jesse Jackson was born on October 8, 1941 in Greenville, South Carolina.<sup>1</sup> Jackson, born out of wedlock, grew up in a black middle class household.<sup>2</sup> Charles Jackson, who married Jesse's mother, adopted her two year old child and gave the boy his last name.<sup>3</sup> Charles Jackson worked for the post office. Jesse's mother, Helen Burns Jackson, worked as a beautician. These two incomes provided the family with adequate food to eat, clothing to wear and a home in which to live. When he was old enough to work Jesse earned money collecting movie tickets at a local theater.<sup>4</sup>

In high school Jackson excelled in his studies. An accomplished quarterback at Sterling High in Greenville, Jesse accepted a football scholarship to attend the University of Illinois. When he discovered that as a black man he could not join a fraternity or play quarterback at the school, he transferred to the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State College. At North Carolina Jackson became president of the student

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<sup>1</sup> Jesse L. Jackson, Straight From The Heart, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), preface p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. Landess, Richard M. Quinn, Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, (Illinois: Jameson Books, 1985), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Sidney Blumenthal, Pledging Allegiance: The Last Campaign of the Cold War, (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 180.



body and a star quarterback.<sup>5</sup> He also became involved in the local struggle to end segregation. When he graduated from college Jackson decided to become a minister. He studied at the Chicago Theological Seminary.<sup>6</sup> Jackson was greatly influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In their book Jesse Jackson & The Politics of Race, Thomas Landess and Richard Quinn write, "Jackson had seen Martin Luther King, Jr., listened to his lectures, shaken his hand."<sup>7</sup>

Landess and Richard Quinn write that Jackson's decision to enter the ministry grew out of his experience as a young black man in the South. He loathed the Jim Crow laws that were in place. These branded him and every other black man and woman as second-class citizens.<sup>8</sup> According to Jonathan Kaufman, in his book Broken Alliance, African-Americans in Greenville, South Carolina could not eat in any public restaurant nor use any public rest room.<sup>9</sup> As a minister Jackson hoped he would be able to influence blacks and challenge them to work for desegregation and equal rights.

Jonathan Kaufman claims that while Jackson was growing up he made no distinctions between whites and Jews. In Jackson's eyes segregation

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Jesse Jackson & The Politics of Race, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks And Jews In America, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988) p. 252.



was a black-white issue. Kaufman's description of young Jesse Jackson makes this point:

As Jackson saw it, white people had privileges. Black people did not have rights. Jews were white. While there had been anti-Semitic behavior in the United States, Jews had not had to pass through the same strictures as blacks. There had been no laws that enslaved Jews in America, no laws or intimidation that denied the Jews the right to vote. Indeed Jackson believed blacks had often been a buffer between other whites and Jews. The absence of blacks would have meant open season on Jews.<sup>10</sup>

According to Kaufman's understanding, Jackson harbored few specifically anti-Semitic feelings as a young man. If he felt hostility toward Jews it was because they were part of the ruling white majority.

As Jackson grew up in the South, Jews were increasingly taking active roles in the fight for desegregation and civil rights. Only four years after Jackson was born, lawyers from the NAACP, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, and the Anti-Defamation League joined forces to discuss strategies for improving black educational facilities.<sup>11</sup> Their work culminated in the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court decision on public school desegregation.<sup>12</sup> This case involved Esther Brown, a Jewish housewife from a suburb of Kansas City, Kansas, and the children of her black maid.

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<sup>10</sup> *Broken Alliance*, pp. 252-253.

<sup>11</sup> William M. Phillips, Jr., *An Unillustrious Alliance: The African American And Jewish American Communities*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*



Mrs. Brown fought to get these children equal access to quality public education.<sup>13</sup>

Jewish activism in African-American affairs increased dramatically after the discovery of the Nazi death camps.<sup>14</sup> As Jonathan Kaufman reports:

In cities across the country, Jewish organizations lobbied state legislatures and sued in courts to promote fair housing laws and fair employment laws banning discrimination. ....at a time when few people were willing to back the NAACP in its fight against segregated schools, Jews and Jewish groups were stepping forward.<sup>15</sup>

Many Jews stood up for the rights of black Americans as a way to show their distaste for segregation. Some of these people did not want to treat African-Americans the same way that much of Europe had treated their Jewish brothers and sisters. Other Jews were simply passionate about supporting equal rights for all Americans regardless of race, religion, or ethnic background. Kaufman writes:

The civil rights movement offered a point where Jewish self-interest and Jewish morality intersected. Jews knew that on their merits they could make it with everyone else. A society opposed to discrimination was one where Jews could thrive. Tolerance would allow them to grow and prosper.<sup>16</sup>

Jewish groups supported Rosa Parks and her fight for civil rights in

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<sup>13</sup> Broken Alliance, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.



December 1955. Ms. Parks, a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama, made headlines when she boarded a bus and sat down in an empty seat in the front. When a white man approached her to give up her seat she refused to move. After she was jailed, blacks organized a boycott of the bus company. Jewish organizations, primarily from the North, helped to support the boycott. In her book, The Negroes And The Jews, Lenora E. Berson comments, "money from white liberals, and particularly from individual Jews and Jewish organizations, flowed into the boycott fund."<sup>17</sup>

In his article "Jews and Negroes: Where Did We Go Wrong?", Moshe Aberbach describes that many Jews, particularly college students, sacrificed a great deal for the cause of civil rights. He explains, "quite a few were injured or imprisoned, and altogether Jewish participation in this titanic struggle of the 1960's was out of all proportion to their numbers."<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Kaufman notes that, "two of the three civil rights workers killed in Mississippi in the summer of 1964 were Jewish: Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman."<sup>19</sup> As an emerging civil rights leader in the 1960's Jesse Jackson had to be keenly aware of these Jewish contributions to the struggle for civil rights.

Jonathan Kaufman remarks that half the white freedom fighters who

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<sup>17</sup> Lenora E. Berson, The Negroes And The Jews, (New York: Random House, 1971) p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> Moshe Aberbach, "Jews And Negroes: Where Did We Go Wrong?", The Jewish Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 3, Autumn/Winter 1982/83, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Kaufman, "Blacks and Jews: An Historical Persepctive," Tikkun, July/August 1988, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 42-43.



went South were Jewish, as were two thirds of the white students and organizers who traveled to Mississippi to help register black voters in the summer of 1964.<sup>20</sup> Kaufman asserts that a great deal of the money that was raised for civil rights organizations came from Jews:

In the early 1960s three-quarters of the money for the major civil rights organizations; the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and King's Southern Leadership Conference (SCLC) came from Jewish donors.<sup>21</sup>

Jewish attorneys were also very active in the civil rights struggle. For instance, Jack Greenberg, a Jew, was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s lawyer.

In the middle of the 1960's Jesse Jackson actively took part in the struggle for civil rights. According to Sidney Blumenthal, "in 1965 Jackson led twenty seminary students, all white, to Selma, Alabama, after Bloody Sunday, when hundreds of civil rights marchers were tear-gassed and beaten by Alabama Governor George Wallace's state troopers."<sup>22</sup> When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. issued a call for support from the nation's clergy, Jackson was one of the individuals who chose to respond. At the Selma demonstration Jackson pleaded with Ralph Abernathy, Dr. Martin Luther King's second-in-command, to hire him as a staff member for a new chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Chicago.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 181.



After Jackson was hired he dropped out of the seminary. He hoped to devote all of his energies to the fight for civil rights. The organization he worked for was almost entirely financed by Jewish contributions.<sup>24</sup> Whether Jackson knew that this organization was heavily funded by Jewish contributions is difficult to ascertain.

By the middle of 1960's something began to happen to the perceived magic in this black/Jewish alliance. Kaufman observes that although many Jews denied it, "there was an air of paternalism that hovered over the early days of black/Jewish cooperation."<sup>25</sup> Aberbach calls this happy Negro-Jewish alliance misleading:

Underneath the apparent harmony symbolized by the scenes of blacks and whites holding hands and singing, "We Shall Overcome", there were many points of serious tension which were soon to come out into the open and ultimately undermine the foundations of the alliance.<sup>26</sup>

Kaufman explains that as the civil rights movement rolled up success after success, including integration of lunch counters, passage of the Civil Rights Act and of the Voting Rights Act, these tensions were easy to overlook.<sup>27</sup>

Even as blacks and Jews marched for civil rights in the South, and as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel walked armed in arm with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for the cause of justice for all men and women, relations

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Kaufman, "Blacks and Jews: An Historical Perspective," p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> "Blacks And Jews: An Historical Perspective," p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> "Jews And Negroes: Where Did We Go Wrong?", p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> "Blacks And Jews: An Historical Perspective," p. 44.



between ordinary blacks and Jews in the North worsened. In his article, "Behind the Black-Jewish Split," Glenn Loury explains the problems that emerged between blacks and Jews in the North:

Due to the process of residential segregation and ethnic succession in urban areas, blacks often found themselves moving into neighborhoods which had previously been Jewish, renting from Jewish landlords, buying from Jewish merchants. Tenants and landlords, buyers and merchants naturally have a certain opposition of interests.....Many blacks perceived these relationships as exploitative.<sup>28</sup>

In their book, Bittersweet Encounter, Robert Weisbord and Arthur Stein discuss these tensions that existed between Jewish landlords and black tenants and between Jewish storekeepers and black customers. "In almost every instance," the authors observe, "the black was in a subordinate position..."<sup>29</sup>

In certain cities, Jews constituted a majority in those categories [shopkeepers and landlords] and were present out of proportion to their numbers in the overall population. This was particularly the case in cities where the black ghettos were previously Jewish neighborhoods.<sup>30</sup>

According to these authors the black was subordinate because he did not own his own property or place of business. In many of these areas blacks paid their rent to a Jewish landlord and shopped for their groceries at a Jewish market. This caused resentment among many blacks. African

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<sup>28</sup> Glenn C. Loury, "Behind the Black Jewish Split," Commentary, Vol 81, No. 1, January 1986, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Robert G. Weisbord, Arthur Stein, Bittersweet Encounter, (Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1970) p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.



Americans wondered why Jews had to own most of the commercial establishments in their neighborhoods. Conflicts arose in many cities.

In his 1966 article, "The Merchant And The Low Income Consumer," David Caplovitz presents a different picture of the situation. He concludes that such black/Jewish conflicts were inevitable in urban areas:

The important elements in this relationship are the low income and low education of the customers, whatever the color, and how the merchants adapt to, and I might add, take advantage of these facts.<sup>31</sup>

Caplovitz suggested that many Jewish landlords and Jewish merchants took advantage of blacks in northern urban centers. Some blacks accused Jews of introducing them to installment buying. Some Jewish shopkeepers would entice blacks to spend more money than they could afford. Jews would not only garner black business, but they would also earn interest on their customer's purchases.<sup>32</sup>

In Broken Alliance Jonathan Kaufman accuses some Jews of insincerity in dealing with blacks:

Under the guise of "helping" blacks and being their "friend," Jews patronized blacks and exploited them. Jews would leave neighborhoods as blacks moved in. But they kept their businesses there: the apartment buildings they had bought, the stores they owned and ran.<sup>33</sup>

Blacks watched as some Jews were willing to rent them apartments and

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<sup>31</sup> David Caplovitz, "The Merchant And The Low Income Consumer," in Negro-Jewish Relations In The United States, (New York: The Citadel Press, 1966) p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Broken Alliance, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.



take their money, but were unwilling to live in the same neighborhoods with them. This led to much resentment in black urban neighborhoods. In addition, many Jews were not willing to employ blacks in white-collar positions. This also raised black hostilities against the Jews.

In some neighborhoods, where blacks and Jews remained together, hostility was even greater between the two groups. According to Moshe Aberbach, crime and theft increased in the integrated neighborhoods. Integrated schools became battlegrounds for white and black students:

This state of affairs forced countless thousands of Jewish families to move out of "integrated" neighborhoods in what can only be described as a traumatic uprooting of entire communities from the inner to the outer suburbs, often leaving the poor and the aged to fend for themselves. Unlike other ethnic communities, which refused to permit blacks to move into their neighborhoods, the Jews offered no resistance but only ran.<sup>34</sup>

The alliance between blacks and Jews in the South suffered a major setback in 1967, when civil rights leaders and antiwar activists gathered together over Labor Day weekend for the National Convention on New Politics.<sup>35</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the convention. During the gathering, rumors circulated that the delegates might nominate King to a third-party ticket to run against Lyndon Johnson in 1968.<sup>36</sup> Kaufman explains that, "within days however the convention collapsed in a torrent

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<sup>34</sup> "Jews And Negroes: Where Did We Go Wrong?", p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> "Blacks And Jews: An Historical Perspective," p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid



of factional disputes. The black caucus gained control and passed a resolution denouncing the 'imperialist Zionist war'; Israel's victory in the Six Day War."<sup>37</sup> Many blacks began to identify with the Arab cause. Some saw a parallel between Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and white America's treatment of African Americans.

Calls for Black Power from the black caucus overshadowed many of Dr. King's appeals for integration. Soon after the convention ended the newsletter of the SNCC published an article denouncing Zionism. Black members of the SNCC urged blacks to help displaced Palestinians. Some blacks students symbolically adopted Arabs as their Third World allies of color. According to Taylor Branch, in 1967 blacks altered the very way that they thought about themselves:

They changed the most commonly accepted name for the race from "Negro" to "black" almost overnight. SNCC soon expelled its white members, discarded the old "We Shall Overcome" rhetoric as sappy, and fashioned an ideology blended of separatism, Pan-Africanism, Marxism, racial pride, and don't-tread-on-me-ism.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of these changes in black ideology, blacks and Jews involved in the civil rights alliance turned inward and away from each other. Jews were frightened by the increasing militancy of the Black Power movement. Jewish energies that might have been used in the fight for civil rights were now directed to Israel after her lightening victory in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor Branch, "The Uncivil War," Esquire, May 1989, p. 95.



the Six Day War. Lucy Dawidowicz' explanation of this phenomenon notes that, "the miracle of Israel's victory gave rise in turn to a universal feeling among Jews of religious redemption....And if God had returned to the Jews, so the Jews began to return to him and to their people."<sup>39</sup>

A new sense of Jewish pride emerged among American Jews. Israel's victory in the Six Day War seemed to change the way that American Jews thought about themselves. Taylor Branch asserts that Jews stopped changing their Jewish sounding names in 1967. Many Jews who might have hidden their identity from members of the non-Jewish community before the war, now openly expressed their pride in being Jewish. The emergence of Jewish pride seemed to parallel the emergence of a new black pride.

Blacks developed their own kind of pride. Blacks taught their children to be proud of their African heritage. Some African Americans changed their clothing. Blacks began to wear dashikis and other African-inspired garments. Blacks studied African culture with increasing interest. But with these changes many blacks also became more hostile to whites, especially Jews. According to Jonathan Kaufman, the proximity of Jews to blacks made them easy targets for anti-white hostilities. By the end of the 1960's hostility and resentment turned into violence. In many cities black ghettos exploded in riots. Many of these caused damage to small

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<sup>39</sup> Lucy S. Davidowicz, "Politics, the Jews & the 1984 Election," Commentary, Vol. 79, No. 2, February 1985, p. 26.



Jewish shopkeepers who still conducted business in these areas where they had once lived. Shops were looted and buildings were burned.<sup>40</sup> Some saw their livelihoods destroyed.

The black agenda also changed. Some blacks who had harbored resentment against Jews for many years became openly hostile. Others criticized Israeli policies with new fervor and expressed compassion for her enemies. According to Glenn Loury, some Jews viewed black support for Israel's enemies as a slap in the face. To many in the American-Jewish community, black support for the Arab cause was a sign of ingratitude for all the contributions Jews had made to the civil rights struggle.<sup>41</sup>

Blacks also sought changes in the very fabric of American society. African-Americans wanted greater opportunities for education and employment. According to Moshe Aberbach, some militant black leaders recognized that higher education was the key to genuine African American emancipation:

Instead of taking the long hard road of improving the ghetto schools and preparing gifted youngsters for a college education, the impatient militants demanded to put an end to admission by merit....and insisted and continue to insist on black quotas and affirmative action, in effect on reverse discrimination.<sup>42</sup>

Many blacks believed that quotas and affirmative action policies would

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<sup>40</sup> "Blacks And Jews: An Historical Perspective," p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> "Behind the Black-Jewish Split," p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> "Jews And Negroes: Where Did We Go Wrong?, p. 41.



help them reach the American middle class. Jonathan Kaufman argues that, "some Jews saw in affirmative action the specter of the quotas that had once kept them out of medical and law schools."<sup>43</sup> Many blacks believed that affirmative action programs would provide them with opportunities that they might not have otherwise received. Quotas would allow them to enter many of the nations finest corporations and universities.

Glenn Loury asserts that, "some blacks saw the use of quotas in employment and education as a necessary and just recompense for the wrongs of history."<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Kaufman argues that Jewish criticism of quotas and affirmative action programs cut to the very heart of the emerging black agenda: "It meant attacking not only a key black issue, but also the most articulate and influential leaders of the black community."<sup>45</sup>

In 1973, when Allan Bakke, a thirty-four year old white Protestant male, charged that he was denied admission to the University of California Medical School at Davis due to an affirmative action program in place, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the Anti-Defamation League all supported his challenge.<sup>46</sup> Tensions between blacks and Jews escalated further.

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<sup>43</sup> "Blacks and Jews: An Historical Perspective," p. 93.

<sup>44</sup> "Behind the Black Jewish Split, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> "Blacks and Jews: An Historical Perspective," p. 93.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid



Working for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Chicago throughout the late 1960's and early 1970's Jesse Jackson got caught up in the Black Power movement. He was appointed national director of Operation Breadbasket, the economic arm of the SCLC in 1967.<sup>47</sup> According to Sidney Blumenthal as national director of Operation Breadbasket, "Jackson demanded that corporations sign covenants to increase their number of black contractors and franchisers or else face boycotts."<sup>48</sup> In 1970 he organized Black Expo, a Chicago convention of black capitalists. At Black Expo black business owners and black artists displayed and sold their products. The event proved to be a huge financial success. However when it was repeated the following year, and huge sums of money were unaccounted for, Jackson was forced to resign from his position.<sup>49</sup>

This setback did not stop the young Jesse Jackson. He founded his own group, PUSH, People United to Save Humanity. This organization continued demanding covenants for black contractors from white businesses. According to Landess and Quinn PUSH simply picked up where Operation Breadbasket left off:

It engaged in activities designed to further the welfare of blacks in general and black businessmen in particular. But while the chief activity of Breadbasket was to see that others hire blacks, sell black products, and use black services,

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<sup>47</sup> Straight From The Heart, preface p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Pledging Allegiance, p. 184.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*



Operation Push soon developed a more ambitious program, one that had as its aim the development of a black strategy to move into big business, to claim a place in the giant corporate structure.<sup>50</sup>

According to Kenneth Wald, PUSH also tried to instill black youth with self-respect. <sup>51</sup> He notes, "Through rallies, worship services, appeals to the family and community, and radio broadcasts, Jackson exhorted young people to help themselves by foreswearing drugs and other self-destructive pursuits in favor of education."<sup>52</sup> PUSH expanded nationwide and Jackson's philosophy of self-help attracted national media attention.

Wald observes that because of strong leadership in developing Operation PUSH, Jackson became a, "premier spokesman for the black community."<sup>53</sup> The author notes:

His personal dynamism, coupled with the institutional base of the movement, brought Jackson repeated speaking engagements around the nation and frequent opportunities to address a national audience through the mass media. By dint of these efforts and remarkably favorable press coverage Jackson could lay a credible claim to the position once held by King as the principal spokesman for black political aspirations.<sup>54</sup>

Jackson diversified PUSH by enlarging the original organization. In

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<sup>50</sup> Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, p. 68.

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth D. Wald, "Ministering To The Nation: The Campaigns Of Jesse Jackson And Pat Robertson," as cited in Nominating The President, Emmett H. Buell, Jr., Lee Sigelman, Editors, (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1991) p. 125.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid



1977 Jackson founded PUSH for Excellence and in 1982 Jackson founded the PUSH International Trade Bureau.<sup>55</sup> Each of these organizations hoped to inspire black Americans to take responsibility for their own economic well-being. Sidney Blumenthal writes that Jesse Jackson fashioned himself as a modern Booker T. Washington. Jackson continually stressed the themes of self-sufficiency and self-help for black Americans.<sup>56</sup>

It seems that many of the issues that created tensions among blacks and Jews in the public arena in the late 1960's continued to cause tensions between blacks and Jews throughout the 1970's. Some blacks were angry that Jews did not exhibit greater support for quotas and affirmative action programs. Many blacks perceived this Jewish stance as a way to keep members of the African-American community in a subordinate position to Jews. Some Jews were angered over black criticism of Israeli policy and black support for Israel's enemies. Jews suggested that this showed black ingratitude for Jewish contributions to the civil rights struggle.

During the 1970's Jesse Jackson was seen by many blacks as the spokesman for the African-American community. He represented many of the goals and aspirations of ordinary black Americans. A successful businessman, Jackson traveled throughout the United State urging his black brothers and sisters to remain in school, to work hard and to become financially independent. Jackson also tried to instill a sense of

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<sup>55</sup> Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> Pledging Allegiance, p. 185.



black pride in the minds of African Americans.

What Jesse Jackson thought about members of the American-Jewish community during the 1970's is difficult to ascertain. His comments at the end of the decade would provide greater insight.



## Chapter II

### Jackson Angers American Jews: 1979

It was not until 1979 that the activities of Jesse Jackson became a topic of concern among American Jews. In August of that year Andrew Young resigned as United States Ambassador to the United Nations. Before his resignation Young had been the highest ranking African American in the Carter Administration. He had been a symbol of great pride for blacks. Members of the black community were angry about the circumstances surrounding his resignation. Many were distraught to see Young step down from his position. According to Robert Weisbord and Richard Kazarian Jr., Young symbolized the aspirations of black America. "He represented a new level of black achievement in the federal government."<sup>1</sup>

Young had violated American diplomatic policy by secretly meeting with an official of the Palestine Liberation Organization on July 26. When news of this meeting first surfaced Young denied any wrongdoing. He claimed that he had simply bumped into Zehadi Labib Terzi, the PLO observer at the United Nations, at a social gathering at the home of the Kuwaiti Ambassador. Later Young admitted that he had formally met with the PLO representative and had failed to tell the State Department about the meeting. Young was strongly reprimanded for his actions by members

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<sup>1</sup> Robert G. Weisbord, Richard Kazarian, Jr., Israel In The Black American Perspective, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985) p. 123.



of the Carter Administration. On August 15 Andrew Young submitted his resignation.

Jesse Jackson was one of many black leaders stunned by Young's resignation.<sup>2</sup> Jackson did not agree with the 1975 agreement between Israel and the United States which specified that these countries were not to meet with members of the PLO. He could not understand why the United States government would not foster discussion between officials of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, if such a meeting might lead to new avenues for peace in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> Weisbord and Kazarian believe that, "Jesse Jackson interpreted Young's resignation as a capitulation to pressure emanating from Jewish groups."<sup>4</sup>

Jackson, like many other black leaders, directed his anger over Young's resignation towards the American-Jewish community. He blamed American Jews for Young's resignation. In his frustration Jackson remarked, "the Klan didn't move on Andy."<sup>5</sup> Here he implied that it was not the Ku Klux Klan, the secret, chiefly anti-black terrorist organization that caused Young's downfall, but rather that members of the Jewish community were responsible. Weisbord and Kazarian cite an editorial from Afro-American that attributed Young's resignation to American Jewish influence. The publication accused Jews of, "acting like spoiled

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> "A Man For No Season," B'nai B'rith Messenger, Vol. 83, No. 42, October 19, 1979, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Israel In The Black American Perspective, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> "A Letter To Jesse," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 133, No. 2, August 24, 1979, p. 6.



children because they could not unilaterally shape United States foreign policy on the Middle East.<sup>6</sup>

Weisbord and Kazarian argue that the resignation of Andrew Young ignited a conflict between blacks and Jews that had been simmering for many years:

The ouster of Young precipitated a confrontation between blacks and Jews that exceeded the expected boundaries; but it was not the cause of the tensions...Blacks and Jews in the United States had been on a collision course for more than a decade. The conflict between them arose out of a long series of events which in total threatened the potential disintegration of a once powerful civil rights alliance. The only surprise was that Andrew Young served as an unwilling catalyst for the escalation of hostilities.<sup>7</sup>

Jesse Jackson's words supplied evidence for this point of view. He made these remarks about the Young resignation:

When there wasn't much decency in society, many Jews were willing to share decency. ..The conflict began when we started our quest for power. Jews were willing to share decency, but not power.<sup>8</sup>

These comments painted a picture of Jackson's thoughts about the American-Jewish community in 1979. First, he acknowledged Jewish involvement in the push for civil rights. He recognized that when much of white America cared little about rights for blacks and other minorities,

<sup>6</sup> Afro-American, September 1, 1979 as cited in Israel In The Black Perspective, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> Israel In The Black Perspective, p. 124.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Yaffe, "Vendetta Overtones In Racial Dialogue", The Jewish Week And The American Examiner, Vol. 192, No. 13, August 26, 1979, p. 19.



many Jews had worked with members of the African-American community to achieve these goals. Yet Jackson seemed to believe that now when blacks needed access to higher education, better jobs and economic resources, Jews were not willing to help them with these endeavors. Jackson perceived negative Jewish responses to affirmative action as an attempt to protect Jewish interests

Jonathan Kaufman, in his book Broken Alliance observes that most blacks believed, "Every Jewish organization, with various degrees of stricture, opposed quotas and certain types of affirmative action."<sup>9</sup> Jackson seemed to take this same position. He seemed to think that Jews did not want blacks to garner positions of leadership. Jackson perceived that Jews were afraid to allow blacks greater access to university educations and employment opportunities because in so doing their own status might be diminished.

Kaufman observes that blacks and Jews also disagreed on matters of foreign policy. Many blacks opposed Israel's sale of arms to South Africa.<sup>10</sup> In the late 1970's Jackson became one of Israel's staunchest critics on this issue: "It was black politicians, and leaders, like Young and Jackson," Kaufman writes, "who raised questions about the thrust of American policy in the Middle East and who urged dealings with the PLO."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Kaufman, Broken Alliance, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), p. 272.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid



When Jesse Jackson appeared on NBC-TV's "Meet The Press" on September 2, 1979 he addressed the issue of Young's resignation and affirmed his negative feelings toward U.S. policy towards Israel. Jackson blamed both Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and American Jewish leaders for playing an important role in Young's resignation. He explained that, "the overreaction by the Israeli government did have a lot to do with Andy Young being dismissed.....major Jewish leaders in New York also called for his (Young's) ouster."<sup>12</sup>

The American Jewish press featured many articles on the events surrounding the Young resignation. Jews were incensed that Jackson, along with many other members of the black community, seemed to feel that they were responsible for Young's resignation. Jackson's comments were quoted in several of these publications. In one editorial Nathan Ziprin wrote:

Among the most indecent of utterances was made by the Reverend Jesse Jackson when he falsely stated that Jews "were willing to share decency, but not power" with blacks. That gentleman who thinks he gets his wisdom via a pipeline to heaven, just has a long tongue and doesn't know what to do with it.<sup>13</sup>

Another editorial reiterated the view that the Jewish community bore no responsibility for Young's resignation. In the Baltimore Jewish Times

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Polakoff, "Harris Denies Permanent Rift In Black-Jewish Ties", B'nai B'rith Messenger, Vol. 83, No. 36, September 7, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Nathan Ziprin, "One Man's Opinion", B'nai B'rith Messenger, Vol. 83, No. 37, September 14, 1979, Sec. 1, p. 37.



an editor commented:

We applauded Jesse as he worked to inspire the black pride movement toward self-improvement. Whatever our differences we agreed that civil progress would come for us all by making our opportunities grow.....So it came as a gut blow to hear Jesse Jackson proclaim that, "the Klan didn't move on Andy..." as he implied that the Jews were responsible for his fall from diplomatic position. Young took on the power willingly of representing his country in an official and sensitive position. He wasn't forced to resign by Jews because he was black. He was removed by an Administration that he had embarrassed by lying about his actions.<sup>14</sup>

Richard Yaffe wrote in The Jewish Week And The American Examiner that blacks were looking for someone to blame for Young's unfortunate situation, and they decided upon the Jews. He explains, "Now angry and frustrated because the black in the most predominant government position in the country had been sacked, the blacks are looking for a scapegoat and have found it, they believe in the Jews....."<sup>15</sup>

Tensions escalated between blacks and Jews in the public arena during the summer of 1979. Some blacks used Young's resignation as a chance to verbalize deeply felt anti-Jewish statements. The Andrew Young affair brought all of the smouldering differences between Jews and blacks to the surface, such as strongly opposing views on affirmative action and job

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<sup>14</sup> "A Letter To Jesse," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 133, No. 2, August 24, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> "Vendetta Overtones In Racial Dialogue," Ibid, p. 19.



quotas.<sup>16</sup> Thelma Thomas Davis, president of Delta Sigma Theta, a predominantly black sorority, got caught up in this anti-Jewish fervor. At Delta Sigma Theta's annual convention Ms. Davis addressed the 6000 delegates in attendance:

We have been patient and forbearing in their (Jews) masquerading as friends under the pretense of working for the common purpose of civil rights. This latest affront reveals clearly that their loyalties are not compatible with the struggle of black America for equal opportunity under the law. Indeed we question whether their loyalties are first to the State of Israel or to the United States.<sup>17</sup>

She believed that Jewish influence played a key role in Andrew Young's resignation. She declared that Jews were not to be trusted and that their loyalty to the United States should be questioned.

Like Davis, other blacks used the Young resignation as an opportunity to voice their opinions about the current state of black/Jewish affairs. Georgia State Senator Julian Bond said that Young's resignation "has in fact already damaged an already unhappy relationship between the American Jewish organizational spokesmen and the rank and file and the leadership of American blacks."<sup>18</sup> Other black leaders were not so sure of the effect of the Young resignation on black/Jewish relationships. John McNeill, the

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<sup>16</sup> "Vendetta Overtones In Racial Dialogue," p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> "Acceptance Of Young's Resignation angers Blacks," B'nai B'rith Messenger, Vol. 83, No. 34, August 24, 1979, p.6.

<sup>18</sup> "Black, Jewish Leaders In Conflict," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 133, No. 3, August 31, 1979, p.13.



black campaign director for the Republican National Committee noted, "Jobs, housing, energy are the issues that affect the quality of life for black Americans, not Jews and Arabs talking. Six months from now the Young affair won't be a front-burner or a second-burner issue."<sup>19</sup>

Yet it was Jesse Jackson who used this period of black anti-Jewish sentiment most skillfully. With the help of the media he accused Jews of contributing to the limiting of opportunities for blacks:

Once we began to push for our share of universal slots in institutions.....Jews called them quotas and opposed us. Even as we were expected to support jets for Israel, Jews had no problem with an expanding relationship with South Africa and sitting across the table from us on quotas<sup>20</sup>

Here Jackson amplified one of the most divisive issues between the black and the Jewish communities. Most blacks were staunch supporters of affirmative action programs and quota systems. They argued that these would help open doors for blacks in higher education and in employment. Yet many Jews were not in favor of such programs.<sup>21</sup> They believed that quota systems would hinder the admittance or the hiring of the most qualified person by limiting the number of Jews or blacks that could be admitted or hired. The possibility of a modern quota system seemed particularly threatening to Jews. Quotas had limited Jewish access to

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<sup>19</sup> "Black Experts Find Man In Street Less Than Excited Over PLO Issue," The Jewish Week And The American Examiner, September 2, 1979, Vol. 192, No. 14, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> "Vendetta Overtones In Racial Dialogue," p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Broken Alliance, p. 272.



higher education and employment opportunities earlier in the 20th Century.

On the September 16, 1979 edition of "60 Minutes" a segment focused on the changes in black/Jewish relations since the Andrew Young resignation. The Reverend Jesse Jackson was one of the people interviewed. In a September 21, 1979 editorial, the B'nai B'rith Messenger reported on the segment. The editor summarized Jackson's feelings on the importance of speaking with the Palestine Liberation Organization:

Reverend Jackson's insistence on meeting with the PLO's Yasir Arafat and his continuous call for blacks in the United States to get involved in Arafat's cause appears to be the biggest factor in the current black-Jewish split<sup>22</sup>

The author of this editorial also alluded to what Jackson said on this newsmagazine:

The stereotypes, and we have no choice but to refer to it as such, that Jews control the banking industry and refuse to let blacks get into any of the positions of profit sharing, which was espoused by Reverend Jackson is absurd, and it is inconceivable that it should go unchallenged.<sup>23</sup>

Whether or not his editorial accurately represented Jackson's position, it seemed clear that Jackson knew how to irritate a Jewish audience.

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<sup>22</sup> "Sixty Minutes Unfulfilled", B'nai B'rith Messenger, September 21, 1979, Vol. 83, No. 38, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid



Why did Jackson appear so insensitive to Jewish concerns? Did he want to further erode strained black/Jewish relations? After the Andrew Young incident, "there was an awakened realization of race where none had appeared to exist before, at least not in the black community as a whole."<sup>24</sup> For the first time many black leaders, including Reverend Jackson, came to realize the special relationship that Jews had with other Jews living in the State of Israel. Blacks acknowledged that Jews worked together to influence American policy in the Middle East. Maybe blacks should do this for their brothers and sisters in the Middle East and in Africa?

Landess and Quinn write about the emerging feeling among black leaders at this time that, "Black Americans must love the dark skinned peoples of the Middle East and Africa as their soul brothers and fellow victims of white European imperialism."<sup>25</sup> Jackson and other black leaders advocated speaking with members of the PLO. They sought to help their brothers who were the victims of a supposed Israeli imperialist policy. Jackson did not stop to consider how such tactics would hurt black/Jewish relations in America.

In September 1979 Jesse Jackson spoke out on the importance of recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization. Jackson announced that he and nine other black leaders would embark on a fact-finding mission to

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas H. Landess, Richard M. Quinn, Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, (Illinois: Jameson Books, 1985), p. 141.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 142.



the Middle East. One of the goals of this journey would be to speak with Yasir Arafat in order to convince him, "to declare a moratorium on violence against Israel and to recognize the right of the Jewish State to exist." He would also seek an audience with Menachem Begin, Hafez al-Assad, and Anwar Sadat.<sup>26</sup>

On the advice of Moshe Dayan and several American-Jewish organizations, Menachem Begin refused to meet with Jackson.<sup>27</sup> An Israeli foreign ministry spokesman was quoted as having said, "He has appointed himself to a mission which he has prejudiced before he even began."<sup>28</sup> Landess and Quinn observe that not everyone felt that Begin should have decided not to speak with Jackson.

Zev Furst, the Anti-Defamation League Representative in Jerusalem, criticized Begin for his failure to talk with the black civil rights leader. What, after all, were a few idle words, particularly when relations between blacks and Jews had been exacerbated by the Andy Young affair?<sup>29</sup>

An editorial in the September 28, 1979 issue of the Baltimore Jewish Times shared these same sentiments. It explained that while it was understandable that Menachem Begin did not want to meet with Jesse Jackson it also called this refusal a mistake:

According to the Washington Post....Begin refused the

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<sup>26</sup> "Courtied By Arafat, Rebuffed By Begin," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 133, No. 7, September 28, 1979, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, Ibid, p. 144

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 145

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 146.



meetings because of Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan's arguments that Jackson's statements in the wake of the Andrew Young affair amounted to anti-Semitism and affronted Israel.<sup>30</sup>

The editor suggested that rather than hold these remarks against Jackson, Begin should have used the opportunity to educate the civil rights leader. He suggested that Begin might have taken Jackson to the Golan Heights where Syrian guns were aimed at Israel, or to Yad Vashem to learn the true history of the Holocaust.

The Baltimore Jewish Times reported on October 5, 1979 that the Jackson trip to Israel:

took on the trappings of a campaign media event this week as he toured Arab neighborhoods, drawing mixed reactions from the Arabs and charges from two Jewish members of his party that his real goal was self-promotion.<sup>31</sup>

Jackson was accused of lacking any concern about Israel, her people, or her future, and caring only about his own political ambitions. In fact Phillip Blazer, the Los Angeles publisher of Israel Today, who helped Reverend Jackson organize his trip to Israel, and traveled with him, reported that Jackson had made some distasteful remarks about Jews on their trip to the Jewish State.<sup>32</sup> Blazer said that Jackson complained of being:

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<sup>30</sup> "Begin's Blunder," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 133, No. 7, September 28, 1979, pg. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Rev. Jackson's Traveling Salvation Show," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 133, No. 8, October 5, 1979, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid



sick and tired about hearing constantly of the Holocaust. The Jews do not have a monopoly in suffering and they merely want to put the Americans in a position of having to take a guilt trip. We have to get on with the issues of today and not talk about the Holocaust.<sup>33</sup>

With these remarks Jackson seemed to show little respect for Jewish history and Jewish suffering.

Jackson's insensitivity was again demonstrated with his comments at the end of his visit to Yad Vashem. Rather than simply walking away from the memorial to the six million Jews, Jackson felt compelled to say that now he better understood:

the persecution complex by many Jewish people that almost invariably makes them overreact to their own suffering because it was so great. The suffering is atrocious, but really not unique to human history. It's not exclusive. It's tragic, it's one of the great expressions of tragedy. It also explains why none of us should ever be guilty of isolated politics. We're one human family.<sup>34</sup>

Jews and the Jewish media all over the United States jumped on Jackson's words. And they spoke out vociferously: "what did Jackson mean by saying that 'we' overreact?" They wondered why people all over the world could understand the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but why Jackson did not see this tragic event in the same light. Editorials castigated Jackson's choice of words. Landess and Quinn remark on the words that Jesse

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid



Jackson uttered at the museum:

To be fair, he probably had no idea of the impact of how the phrase "persecution complex" would strike the ears of a people who had lost six million of their loved ones to the ovens of Adolf Hitler. Nor was the verb "overreact" carefully chosen. It is unlikely, however, that it was used in complete innocence. Jackson was clearly speaking his heart, and never before or since,...would he reveal his anti-Semitic feelings so clearly as in this offhanded remark to the press.<sup>35</sup>

Landess and Quinn, who are sympathetic to Jewish concerns in their book, were outspoken in their views of Jackson's words at Yad Vashem. They contend that the Reverend's true feelings were being displayed.

Yet if Jackson was in the Middle East trying to build a better relationship between his so called "Arab brothers" and the Israelis, why would he knowingly insult the Jews? Might he not have understood that these topics were of utmost sensitivity to Jews? Did Jesse Jackson really not care about what the Jewish community thought of him?

The answer to these questions seemed clearer for American Jews on the morning of September 30, 1979. Newspapers all across the country printed a picture of the Reverend Jesse Jackson and PLO chairman Yasir Arafat in full embrace. Landess and Quinn observe, "Words Jackson had spoken might have been misrepresented or taken out of context, but the photograph removed all doubts."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 148.



Jackson posed for this photograph with Arafat in Beirut as they, along with Jackson's fact-finding contingent, sang the words to the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome". At first Jews were speechless. Later they posed many questions. How could a self-proclaimed advocate for civil rights embrace the terrorist who had been responsible for so many Israeli civilian deaths over the years? Jews saw this embrace as a slap in the face. How could they ever forget this image?

The Jewish media swiftly responded to Jackson's latest actions. Editorials were written about his alleged anti-Semitic activities. An editorial in the B'nai B'rith Messenger featured these heated words:

The Reverend Jesse Jackson, who lays claim to being a leader in behalf of civil rights, dances on the same stage with the leaders of Araby where slavery is not condoned, but still thrives. He embraces Arafat the warlord, leader of the PLO, who endorses the murder of children as a legitimate act of war.<sup>37</sup>

The Jewish Week And The American Examiner added these comments about Jackson's trip:

The tragi-comedy that reached its culmination of absurdity when the Reverend Jesse Jackson and Yasir Arafat sang, "We Shall Overcome" together.....it now appears that the NAACP and the Urban League, while opposed to any dealings with the PLO and to a break with the Jewish community, wanted to give the Rev. Jesse Jackson plenty of rope on

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<sup>37</sup> "Rhetoric, No Substance," B'nai B'rith Messenger, Vol. 83, No. 40, October 5, 1979, p. 24.



which to hang with which to trip himself up.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to most American-Jewish organizations, some mainstream black organizations also felt that Jackson's trip to the Middle East unnecessarily threatened the delicate balance between blacks and Jews in America. In fact some of these black organizations were happy to see Jackson's motives questioned. Like the members of the Jewish community, some of these blacks were unsure why Jackson was bent on distancing himself from American Jews.

On October 25, 1979 Jesse Jackson was a guest on "Donahue." Phil Donahue and his audience asked Jackson questions about his trip to Israel and about the current rift in black/Jewish relations. When Donahue asked Jackson whether he understood the deep concerns that the American Jewish community had about an individual who would embrace Yasir Arafat, a man viewed by many as an international terrorist, the Reverend defended his actions. He claimed that it was an Arab custom to hug and to embrace upon meeting, and not to do so was viewed as an insult.<sup>39</sup> On the question of Arafat being a terrorist Jackson remarked:

The fact is I deplore terrorism and told Mr. Arafat that we deplore terrorism. But if one measures terrorism by one yardstick, the killing of innocent women and children, there is terror on both sides.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Jackson Is Overcome," The Jewish Week And The American Examiner, Vol. 192, No. 21, October 21, 1979, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> "Donahue," Transcript No. 10259, Multimedia Program Productions, October 25, 1979, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



With this comment Jackson clearly suggested that the State of Israel also engaged in the practice of terrorism. Yet he refused to admit that the PLO was a terrorist organization. Jackson suggested that the United States needed to become more actively involved in trying to eliminate the terror on both sides of the Arab/Israeli conflict.<sup>41</sup>

When asked by an audience member if he had read the Palestinian Covenant and seen the articles that called for the complete destruction of the Jewish State, Jackson offered a lengthy answer. He explained that one of the things that he did in his meeting with Yasir Arafat was to urge him to recognize Israel's right to exist. Jackson reminded the audience that only two years ago Egypt and Israel had been in a state of war. Now they had a relationship because both sides had agreed to talk.

Donahue asked Jackson if he thought that when he made his trip to the Middle East, "he just might have talked too much."<sup>42</sup> He was questioning Jackson on whether he had said certain things about the Jewish experience, particularly about the Holocaust, that might have been perceived as insensitive to the Jewish community. Jackson refused to admit to any such possibility. When Donahue directly asked Jackson if he commented that Jews were too sensitive about the Holocaust he also denied making such a claim:

We were standing there with a guide. (outside Yad Vashem) After we had toured the Holocaust memorial

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 6.



site, he said, "How do you feel?" I said, "One cannot go to this without having a heavy heart and really bleeding eyes." And I was saying, "You know, this phrase you guides use about never again?" I said, "That really should apply to everybody because all of us must bear some guilt for locking Jews out.".....He said, "But you put this in very general terms; you see, but our experience is unique." I said, "Tragic." "Unique." I said, "Well I choose to use the word "tragic".<sup>43</sup>

Later on the program Jackson described how many blacks were killed as they traveled on slave ships from Africa to America. He also added that Turks and Armenians had been massacred during World War I. Jackson explained that he did not mean to insult the tour guide at Yad Vashem with his remarks but that journalists had created an unfair story and misused his words.

When Donahue asked Jackson if he had said that the Jews were engaged in the civil rights movement for self-serving purposes the Reverend also denied making this remark. Jackson answered by recalling a statement of some 200 black leaders in New York who said that Jews related to blacks because it was in their interest to do so. So too was it in the interests of blacks to relate to Jews. Jackson explained that this relationship was based upon a sense of mutuality.

Jackson continued to describe black/Jewish relations:

The Jews give blacks money. They give blacks some

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



money, but blacks give Jews money. We vote for the right of Israel to exist and its needs for security, our tax monies go to support the right of Israel, Israel gets more foreign aid than the entire continent of Africa and yet blacks have never protested that budget. The point is, we help each other and we need each other. And that degree of mutuality and respect must prevail.<sup>44</sup>

Jackson seemed to admit that Jews and blacks needed each other to reach their individual goals. Jews needed black support of Israel for the Jewish State to exist. Blacks needed the financial support of Jewish organizations to help finance their own organizations. Blacks also needed Jewish support to stand up for equal rights for all blacks. According to Jackson, it was in each group's self interest to support the other. Such support had to be founded on mutual respect.

Although the tensions that emerged between blacks and Jews over the Andrew Young affair and Jackson's trip to Israel focused primarily on foreign policy issues, they were not unconnected to issues at home. Some blacks seemed to think that Jews wielded too much power in America. Others perceived that Jews intentionally refrained from helping African Americans improve their economic status. Young's resignation seemed to bring this black anger against the Jewish community to the surface. Clearly Jesse Jackson's words reflected this hostility.

Jesse Jackson found himself in the middle of these issues. His rhetoric

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 4.



about the American Jewish community assured that Jews would keep him in this position. Jackson's views about Jews only exacerbated hostile black/Jewish relations.



### Chapter III

#### Jackson As Presidential Candidate: 1984

The Reverend Jesse Jackson declared his intentions to run for President of the United States on November 3, 1983.<sup>1</sup> Four days after this announcement the New York Times printed a news analysis entitled, "Arabs, Jackson And Jews: New Page Of Tense Relations,"<sup>2</sup> The article described Jackson's decision to keep a speaking engagement with the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee on November 7. According to Lucius Barker, in a personal account of his participation in Jackson's 1994 Presidential campaign, "the story indicated that in the past Jewish organizations had attacked Jackson's positions in favor of a Palestinian homeland, and criticized his earlier visits with Arab leaders, including PLO chairman Yasir Arafat."<sup>3</sup>

Ronald Smothers reported in his New York Times article that some of Jackson's aides believed that Jackson should have taken these feelings into consideration when he agreed to speak to Arab leaders. They suggested, "a wise political strategy would have been to appear before Jewish groups first."<sup>4</sup> Some of Jackson's aides believed that this might have helped to

<sup>1</sup> Barker, Lucius J., Our Time Has Come: A Delegate's Diary Of Jesse Jackson's 1984 Presidential Campaign, (Illinois: University Of Illinois Press, 1988) p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Smothers, Ronald, "Arabs, Jackson And Jews: New Page Of Tense Relations," New York Times, November 7, 1983, p. B12.

<sup>3</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> "Arabs, Jackson And Jews: New Page Of Tense Relations," p. B12.



diffuse potential Jewish opposition to Jackson's speaking engagement. One aide, Ernest Green, held a different opinion. He remarked, "at one point Mr. Jackson himself pointed out that to appear to back away now from support of a Palestinian homeland would make him no different from the other candidates."<sup>5</sup> According to Barker, Jackson thought that it was important to hold on to his views.<sup>6</sup>

Some members of the American Jewish community worried about more than Jackson's opinions on the Middle East. Nathan Perlmutter, the executive director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, explained that Jackson's image in the Jewish community was not only based upon his Middle East opinions.

Many of us remember that he is the man who is sick and tired of hearing about the Holocaust and that he blamed 'Jewish domination of the media' for some of the news coverage he has gotten. Considering these things, coupled with his embrace of Yasir Arafat, I have no question that Jews, like most groups that have a commonality of interest, will be listening closely to what he says.<sup>7</sup>

Four days later, the New York-based group, "Jews Against Jackson," headed by Rabbi Meir Kahane, placed an advertisement in the New York Times. Under a headline that read, Do You Believe That Any Jew Should

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 65

<sup>7</sup> "Arabs, Jackson And Jews: New Page Of Tense Relations," p. B12



Support This Man? Should Any Decent American?, was a 1979 photograph of the Jesse Jackson/ Yasir Arafat embrace.<sup>8</sup> Below the picture the ad read in large print:

WE BELIEVE THAT JESSE JACKSON IS A DANGER TO AMERICAN JEWS, TO THE STATE OF ISRAEL AND TO AMERICA ITSELF. AND WE ARE APPALLED AT THE ABSOLUTE SILENCE OF THE LIBERAL COMMUNITY AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, OF JEWISH LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS. <sup>9</sup>

The advertisement then listed excerpts of statements by Jackson that illustrated his alleged negative attitude toward Jews. Jackson was described as "a builder of a coalition of malcontents who would be a disaster for Jews, for Israel, for America, and for the free world."<sup>10</sup> Supporters were then encouraged to make a financial contribution to stop "Jesse Jackson's threat."<sup>11</sup>

According to Lucius Barker, "the whole developing relationship did cause me to think much more about black-Jewish relations."<sup>12</sup> The author explains that he had underestimated the attention that the media would give to highlighting points of friction between Jackson and Jews.<sup>13</sup> This was exemplified by Rick Atkinson's front page Washington Post article,

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<sup>8</sup> "Jews Against Jackson Advertisement," New York Times, November 11, 1983, p. A24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 69

<sup>13</sup> Ibid



"Peace With American Jews Eludes Jackson," on February 13, 1984.<sup>14</sup> Atkinson's article described how some five years after Jackson's embrace of Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat, Some American Jews were wary about the Reverend's bid for the presidency. Many were concerned about Jackson's ties to Arabs. They worried what such connections might mean for Israel if Jackson was elected president:

There is alarm among some Jews that Jackson's world view, particularly his recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization and support for Arab perspectives, will gain wider currency in the United States and erode America's special relationship with Israel.<sup>15</sup>

The author also described in detail an interview that he had with candidate Jackson. In this exchange Jackson addressed Jewish concerns about his bid for the presidency. He attempted to defend his positions on the Middle East. The candidate explained that his concern with Arabs in the Middle East stemmed from his upbringing in Greenville, South Carolina. Jackson called this area an "occupied zone."<sup>16</sup> Given this experience he was able to understand what Palestinians were going through under Israeli occupation. Yet Jackson also made clear that he identified with the Israelis. He compared the African-American struggle in the United States with the Holocaust. He said, "I also identify with the Israelis because I understand persecution. My people went through a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Rick Atkinson, "Peace With American Jews Eludes Jackson," Washington Post, February 13, 1984, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid



holocaust, a sustained holocaust, and suffering.”<sup>17</sup>

When Jackson was asked whether he believed that the PLO was the best group to speak for the Palestinian people he answered that many Palestinians seemed to feel that it was. He explained that whether or not he agreed with this selection was not the issue. He stressed that each nation should have the right to determine who represented them. He commented, “The Palestinians cannot choose the Israeli leadership. The Israelis cannot choose the Palestinian leadership.”<sup>18</sup>

Jackson also commented on the issue of aid for Israel. He believed that Arab nations should recognize Israel as a legitimate trading partner. In his opinion America’s current alliance with the Jewish State was not healthy:

it excites one nation with 4 million people and incites 21 nations with 106 million people. One crucial way to help Israel is to foster greater trade between Israel and her neighbors, because obviously the more trade Israel has, the less aid Israel needs. Israel almost has a dangerous dependency, a dangerous economic-military dependency on this country.<sup>19</sup>

When asked about his 1979 meeting with Yasir Arafat and the infamous embrace that followed, Jackson was quick to dismiss the significance of the event. He explained that people often greet each other in different ways in different parts of the world.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid



When we were in the Middle East in '79, when we met Arafat, in the Middle East people traditionally embrace. In Japan, they take their shoes off. Embracing Arafat was not embracing his politics....We have not taken an anti-Israel's right to exist policy. Never did.<sup>20</sup>

Although these words might have been spoken to allay Jewish concerns about his candidacy, the Washington Post article went on to describe that two weeks before, two organizations that were connected with Jackson had each received a \$100,000 contribution from the Arab League, an umbrella organization of some 21 Arab countries and the Palestine Liberation Organization.<sup>21</sup> The Post also reported that the Saudi Arabian newspaper Al-Jazirah had printed an article in January encouraging support of Jackson because of his deep empathy for Arab causes.<sup>22</sup> Jackson responded that he was unaware of this article.

In a Newsweek article also published at the beginning of 1984 Jackson claimed that he was unaware that between 1980 and 1982 PUSH-EXCEL and the PUSH Foundation had each received a \$100,000 donation from the Arab League.<sup>23</sup> These funds were reported to have made up 85 percent of the foundations budget for that year.<sup>24</sup> The magazine questioned how a gift of this size could have escaped the candidate's attention, particularly

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Alter, Sylvester Monroe, "Jackson's Arab Connection," Newsweek, February 13, 1984, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid



since Jackson had lobbied Arab leaders for financial assistance during his 1979 Middle East trip.<sup>25</sup> Jackson's lawyer, John Bustamante, believed that the gift should have been a "nonnews story."<sup>26</sup> However as he explained, "Rev. Jackson is running for president and Jews want to know what Arab country the gift may be coming from."<sup>27</sup> Jews remained deeply concerned about Jackson's ties to the Arab world.

The Washington Post story also included, "an account of a conversation," which as later observed, "was to prove a devastating blow to Jackson's entire Presidential campaign and was certain to exacerbate his relations with Jews."<sup>28</sup> Buried on the third continuation page of the story about Jackson and his ties to American Jewry, were these short paragraphs:

In private conversations with reporters, Jackson has referred to Jews as "Hymie" and to New York as "Hymietown."

"I'm not familiar with that," Jackson said..."That's not accurate."<sup>29</sup>

American-Jewish organizations and many members of the secular and Jewish news media jumped on these alleged remarks by Jackson. During a February 20, 1984 interview on the CBS program "Face The Nation" Jackson was asked whether he had made such remarks about Jews. The candidate stated that he had not made these kind of comments. He

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 71

<sup>29</sup> "Peace With American Jews Eludes Jackson," p. A5.



answered, "It simply is not true, and I think that the accuser ought to come forth."<sup>30</sup>

When Jackson concluded his interview on "Face The Nation" he came out of the studio irritated at the focus on the alleged remarks. He screamed in frustration, "It's almost as if there's an attempt to hound us on this question."<sup>31</sup> Jackson placed much of the blame on the media for the unrelenting questions on this issue. Lucius Barker also believed that members of the media helped to inflate the issue.

It is not that the media had any hidden motive but rather that this issue might give a measure of credence to Jackson's alleged pro-Arab sentiments and to the charges of anti-Semitism some had leveled against him. Moreover, the mere allegation of Jackson's having made the remark was a serious charge and, whether true or not, tended to undermine the fundamental moral principles of the Jackson campaign.<sup>32</sup>

Jackson also castigated Rabbi Meier Kahane for his part in blowing these allegations out of proportion. Jackson accused the rabbi of seeking to disrupt his campaign by encouraging protestors at his campaign events. He also accused him of sponsoring hateful radio commercials.<sup>33</sup> As head of the militant Jewish Defense League, Kahane had waged a minor

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<sup>30</sup> CBS, "Face the Nation," February 20, 1984, as cited in Fay S. Joyce, "Jackson Denies Using Term Offensive to Jews," New York Times, February 20, 1984, p. A10.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas H. Landess, Richard M. Quinn, Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, (Illinois: Jameson Books, 1985), p. 209.

<sup>32</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*



war against Jackson since he announced his bid for the Presidency. Kahane and his sympathizers were convinced that Jesse Jackson was a danger to the American-Jewish community. In addition, Jackson denounced American-Jewish leaders for not speaking out more vigorously against Kahane.<sup>34</sup>

On February 22 The American Jewish Congress responded to Jackson's allegations against the leadership of the American-Jewish community. Howard M. Squadron, president and Henry J. Siegman, executive director issued this statement:

Jesse Jackson's charge that Jewish leaders have failed to repudiate activity by an extremist Jewish group is without merit. Furthermore, Mr. Jackson knows it to be without merit. At the start of the Jackson campaign last fall, the American Jewish Congress and numerous other Jewish organizations sharply denounced threats by an extremist group to use disruptive tactics in opposing the Jackson candidacy. Our condemnation was duly reported in the general media as well as in the black press.<sup>35</sup>

At a candidate's debate in New Hampshire, three days after the "Face The Nation" incident, these same "Hymie" questions reappeared. Barbara Walters, the moderator of this ABC News special, asked Jackson whether he had uttered anti-Semitic statements, including referring to Jews as

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<sup>34</sup> Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, p. 209.

<sup>35</sup> Howard M. Squadron, Henry Siegman, "AJ Congress Cites Jackson's Statements As 'Provocative,'" American Jewish Congress News Release, February 22, 1984.



"Hymies."<sup>36</sup> Jackson said three times, "I am not anti-Semitic."<sup>37</sup>

When Ms. Walters pressed him further on the "Hymie" remarks Jackson "stopped short of a categorical denial."<sup>38</sup>

Jewish views of Jackson, already only lukewarm, were further wounded by these allegations. The news media continued to press the Jackson campaign about these alleged remarks. Voters directly asked Jackson if he was an anti-Semite. At a gathering at Daniel Webster College in New Hampshire Jackson affirmed his stand against anti-Semitism. He said, "I am a Christian minister; Jesus is the object of my religious devotion; Jesus was a Jew, so I couldn't be anti-Jewish and worship a Jew."<sup>39</sup>

But a few days later Jackson regained his memory. On February 26, 1984 in a Manchester, New Hampshire synagogue, candidate Jackson admitted to calling Jews "Hymies" and New York City "Hymietown". This recollection came two days before the New Hampshire primary. As he spoke the words of his prepared statement the capacity crowd sat in disbelief. Jesse Jackson was apologizing to American Jewry.

He began his remarks with the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel.

[the story] dealt with the great dilemma of the conflict between Jacob's inner and outer selves. The inner self

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<sup>36</sup> Howell Raines, "Democrats Vie for Position In Calm, Mannerly Debate," New York Times, February 24, 1984, p. A12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Fay S. Joyce, "Questions About Views On Jews Follow Jackson," New York Times, February 26, 1984, p. A29.



yearning to be free, the outer self negotiating with the politics of his day. Ultimately the inner self prevailed. After wrestling with the dilemma, Jacob lost the rhythm of his step. He came up lame, but the freedom of his soul was restored.<sup>40</sup>

These introductory words foreshadowed what he was about to make public to this audience. Just as Jacob had felt a deep inner conflict as to how to handle a particular situation, so too had Jackson felt this struggle. He believed that the words that he would deliver would set his inner self free. He explained that since his 1979 trip to the Middle East he had felt a great deal of pain and hostility from the American-Jewish community. Jackson remarked that during his campaign for the presidency he had worked to ease these hostilities. He sought to bring minorities together.

When, therefore, press reports were circulated, brewing the storm about the word "Hymie," I was deeply disturbed. I watched as the word expanded into paragraphs and then into chapters. At first I was shocked and astonished at the press' interest in this ethnic characterization made in private conversations, apparently overheard by a reporter. I was equally interested that the newspaper saw fit to insert it in line 35 of a story.....What concerns me now is that something so small has become so large that it threatens the fabric of relations that have been so long in the making and that must be protected.<sup>41</sup>

Jackson then took full responsibility for saying those words. He added that he had been fearful that if he admitted to making such remarks in the

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<sup>40</sup> Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Straight From The Heart, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p.132.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 133.



heat of his presidential bid then positive dialogue between blacks and Jews would suffer. Jackson told his audience that sometimes in private conversation people let their guard down and become thoughtless.<sup>42</sup> He hoped that members of the American-Jewish community would believe his heartfelt words.

It was not in the spirit of meanness, but an off-color remark having no bearing on religion or politics. I deny and I do not recall ever making such a statement in any context that would be remotely construed as being either anti-Semitic or anti-Israel. However innocent and unattended it was insensitive and wrong.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to apologizing for making those “Hymie” remarks, Jackson also took this opportunity to respond to Jewish concerns about other alleged anti-Semitic remarks that he had uttered over the years. One that seemed particularly mean spirited had been attributed to Jackson in 1979 by Phillip Blazer of Israel Today. Blazer had accused Jackson of saying, “I am sick and tired of hearing about the Holocaust.”<sup>44</sup> Jackson reiterated his past response to this accusation by stating, “I categorically deny making this statement.”<sup>45</sup>

The context of the alleged, but false, quotation was a visit I made to the Yad Vashem Museum in Israel. After visiting the museum and being moved by what I saw, I expressed my genuine sadness and said that it was tragic and should

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid



never again be allowed to happen. Because I refused to say that it was unique, I know the history of black Americans, Armenians, Native Americans, and others, Mr. Blazer was upset and gave this false accusation to a reporter.<sup>46</sup>

Jackson also responded to allegations made in 1979 that he had equated the Jewish State with the Palestine Liberation Organization. Jackson did not deny making such a claim but rather insisted that his words were taken out of context. He tried to explain the misunderstanding in this way:

Israel constantly refers to the military arm of the PLO as "terrorists" and to its own military arm as "soldiers." The PLO refers to its military arm as "soldiers" and to Israel's military arm as "imperialists." In war both sides see their own military as soldiers fighting a just cause while they both attempt to dehumanize the enemy. My point is, whether a PLO soldier plants a bomb in a garbage can or an Israeli soldier drops a bomb from an airplane, the bottom line is the same, death all around. My position is that the U.S. should side with neither but use its diplomatic and economic strength to reconcile both peoples so that the cycle of pain can end.<sup>47</sup>

Jackson concluded his Manchester remarks with an appeal for a new covenant that would bind up the wounds of blacks and Jews.

The candidate's apology was scrutinized in the Jewish media in the weeks that followed. Some members of the Jewish community were happy to hear that Jackson tried to make amends. Others were unmoved by his

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, pp. 134-135.



remarks. They thought that these apologetic statements were simply a carefully executed media show. Still others worried that if Jackson admitted to making these remarks about Israel and the Jewish people when he was only a candidate for the presidency, would he do things to harm the special relationship between Israel and the United States if he was elected president.

A March 2, 1984 editorial in the B'nai B'rith Messenger took a sarcastic viewpoint on Jackson's apology:

It is fortunate that the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Democratic hopeful for the highest office of our land, regained his memory this week. It is hard to picture an amnesia-victim battling the rigors of such a demanding occupation.....Can you imagine a Jew running for the highest office in America using a racial slur to describe blacks? The mind boggles at the potential uproar that would be created and rightfully so.<sup>48</sup>

In another editorial, a writer for the Nation offered a different perspective. Although this editor was quick to dismiss Jackson's "Hymie" remarks as totally unprofessional, he believed that Jackson's adversaries had made more out of this incident than was required. He wrote:

Jesse Jackson was morally slack and politically foolish in the "hymie" affair, and his cleansing confession came too late to cancel the damage he did. But any mistake would have served his enemies equally well, for their campaign to devalue Jackson's candidacy is aimed at the movement he

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<sup>48</sup> "The Rev. Slips Again," B'nai B'rith Messenger, March 2, 1984, p. 18.



leads and the threat it presents.<sup>49</sup>

The New York Times also commented on Jackson's apology. The paper referred to thoughtless and seemingly bigoted statements made by other public figures and concluded that although the candidate's remarks were insensitive they should not necessarily be viewed as anti-Semitic.

His statement should, finally, end the flap. Perhaps it can also teach the right lesson. That lesson is not pious perfectionism. Everyone, including politicians, says something silly sometimes whether it's a coarse heartiness about a "Fat Jap" or tasteless humor about appointing a black, a woman, two Jews, and a cripple. Such remarks do not necessarily betray concealed bigotry. Sometimes dumb is just dumb. Neither does the right lesson necessarily have to do with anti-Semitism.<sup>50</sup>

Jackson must have been pleased with these comments from the New York Times. His apology to the Jewish community having been made, Jackson was now ready to resume his campaign. Jackson hoped that an intense focus on the issues would turn media attention away from his "Hymie" remarks. Yet the words of Louis Farrakhan insured that this would not be the case.

Farrakhan, the head of the Nation of Islam, had known Jackson since 1972, when they both addressed the National Black Political Convention.<sup>51</sup> Over the years they had become close friends. Both men devoted much

<sup>49</sup> "Jackson Brothers," Nation, Vol. 238, No. 9, March 10, 1984, pp. 275-276.

<sup>50</sup> New York Times, February 28, 1984, as cited in Jesse Jackson & The Politics of Race, p. 215.

<sup>51</sup> Sidney Blumenthal, Pledging Allegiance: The Last Campaign of the Cold War, (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p.195.



energy to trying to improve the black man's plight in America. On Thanksgiving night 1983 Farrakhan was a guest in Jackson's home.<sup>52</sup> When Farrakhan agreed to provide the Presidential candidate with security guards, he became an official Jackson "surrogate."<sup>53</sup> He traveled with the candidate and often introduced him before he spoke.

On February 25, the day before Jackson admitted that he had made the "Hymie" remarks, the candidate met with Farrakhan in Chicago.<sup>54</sup> It was Savior's Day, the most important event of the year for the Nation of Islam. Before Jackson addressed the Black Muslim audience, Jackson and Farrakhan discussed the "Hymie" incident.<sup>55</sup> Later that evening when Farrakhan introduced Jackson he shouted:

I say to the Jewish people who may not like our brother, when you attack him you attack the millions who are lining up with him. You are attacking all of us. If you harm this brother, I warn you in the name of Allah, this will be the last one you do harm.<sup>56</sup>

Jackson made no comment about this threat when he got up to address the crowd. The next morning he traveled to New Hampshire to make his official apology.

Farrakhan surfaced again on March 11 on a radio broadcast in Chicago. On this program the head of the Nation of Islam identified the man that

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Broken Alliance, p. 257.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 258



leaked Jackson's "Hymie" remarks to the press. Farrakhan announced, "We're going to make an example of Milton Coleman. We're going to punish the traitor. One day soon we will punish you with death."<sup>57</sup> Suddenly the media began to pay more attention to Louis Farrakhan and his relationship to Jesse Jackson. Newspapers printed pictures of Farrakhan introducing Jackson at campaign events. They scrutinized Farrakhan's word. How could a Presidential candidate align himself with someone who was so explicitly threatening harm to another?

The media demanded that Jackson denounce Farrakhan's words. Time reported that Jackson called the death threat wrong and counterproductive.<sup>58</sup> Yet he would not castigate his friend. When asked directly about the threat that Farrakhan uttered Jackson replied, "I immediately recognized it as religious metaphor. But it was dangerous language because of the ability to misinterpret it."<sup>59</sup> According to Lucius Barker, Jackson did disassociate himself from some of Farrakhan's remarks made on the March 11 broadcast. "Jackson indicated that he deplored both violence and the threat of violence."<sup>60</sup>

Barker observes that even though Jackson disassociated himself from Farrakhan's words, the candidate chose not to renounce Farrakhan or cut off his ties with him:<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, p. 217.

<sup>58</sup> "Pride And Prejudice," Time, May 7, 1984, p. 34.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>60</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 75.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*



Jackson was well aware that Farrakhan's views met with a great deal of receptivity in the black community, a community whose strong support Jackson certainly needed. Jackson's reluctance to break with Farrakhan was summarized well by attorney Thomas Todd of Chicago, who said, "Why should he renounce someone who is registering and turning out the vote for him to curry favor with white America when white America is not going to vote for him anyway?"<sup>62</sup>

Jackson's friendship with Farrakhan became even more troublesome when it was later revealed that the leader of the Nation of Islam had also spouted these fiery words on his March 11 broadcast, in response to some Jews who had compared him with Hitler.

The Jews don't like Farrakhan, so they call me Hitler. Well that's a good name. Hitler was a very great man. He wasn't great for me as a black person. But he was a great German. Now I'm not proud of Hitler's evil against Jewish people, but that's a matter of record. He rose Germany up from nothing.<sup>63</sup>

Farrakhan's remarks kept Jackson on the defensive. Members of the media pressed the candidate to renounce Farrakhan. Jackson commented, "I find nothing great about Hitler and everything about him despicable. Hitler's greatness was great for some Nazis, but that's all. I find no pleasure in what he represented ideologically or what he did."<sup>64</sup> Barker suggests that after Farrakhan's remarks about Hitler, Jackson began to put some distance between himself and the head of the Nation of Islam. The author

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Broken Alliance, p. 259.

<sup>64</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 76.



asserts that after these incidents Jackson referred to Farrakhan as a supporter and not as a surrogate.<sup>65</sup>

On June 24 Louis Farrakhan delivered another radio address. The head of the Nation of Islam called the creation of the State of Israel an outlaw act. He commented that:

[The creation of Israel] was not done with the backing of Almighty God nor was it done by the guidance of the Messiah. It was your cold, naked scheming, plotting and planning against the lives of a people there in Palestine. Now you have taken the land and you called it Israel and you pushed out the original inhabitants, making them vagabonds in the earth. You have lied and said this was a promise made by God to you.<sup>66</sup>

Farrakhan also remarked that Israel has not had peace in 40 years nor will she ever have peace because, “there can be no peace structured on injustice, thievery, lying, and deceit and using the name of God to shield your gutter religion under his holy and righteous name.”<sup>67</sup>

The news media quickly condemned Farrakhan's words. Jesse Jackson, traveling in Latin America at the time of the radio broadcast, forwarded a statement denouncing Farrakhan's words through his campaign office:

I find such statements or comments to be reprehensible. I disavow such comments and thoughts. I am a Judeo-Christian and the roots of my faith run deep in the Judeo-Christian tradition....I will not permit Minister Farrakhan's words, wittingly, to divide the Democratic party. Neither anti-

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Our Time Has Come, p. 77

<sup>67</sup> Ibid



Semitism nor anti-black statements have any place in our party.<sup>68</sup>

The Jewish media continued to condemn Jackson for any past associations he had with Louis Farrakhan. Many publications wrote editorials urging the Jackson campaign to denounce more than the Nation of Islam leader's words, but also the man himself. When Jews heard that Farrakhan supported the Jackson campaign many assumed that Jackson himself embraced Farrakhan's policies. A Moment special feature offered new insights on this perception. The publication interviewed prominent black leaders in Boston, Louis Farrakhan's hometown, during the summer of 1984 and asked them a variety of questions about black/Jewish relations in America. Many of the questions and responses were directly related to Jesse Jackson's bid for the Presidency and his associations with Louis Farrakhan.<sup>69</sup>

One of the respondents argued that Jewish concerns about Jackson's relationship with Farrakhan were misguided. He argued that Jews were using Farrakhan's statements as a way to criticize the Jackson campaign.

To try to attack Jesse through Farrakhan is an obvious effort to get at Jesse in a roundabout way; Farrakhan really isn't the issue. Part of the issue here, and I am as sensitive to this as I think most Americans are, is Israel, and the Palestinians, and who has taken what

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>69</sup> "As Blacks See It," Moment, Vol. 9, No. 9, October 1984, pp. 25-34.



sides on what.<sup>70</sup>

Another respondent offered these words about Jewish reactions to the Jackson bid for the Presidency.

the commentary of some segments of the Jewish community regarding Jesse Jackson was at times a bit accusatory. A lot of it was emotion-filled. That's not to say that I had no appreciation for the emotion that prompted some of the more virtulic responses. But at times it became difficult to hear the Jackson message. I say that in the context that he did make references to "Hymies" and to "Hymietown," and that in the aftermath of that, you did have statements by Farrakhan. But even prior to that, there were soundings coming from some segments of the Jewish community that represented anything but an affirmative response to Jesse's campaign.<sup>71</sup>

Still another black respondent believed that Jews were not giving candidate Jesse Jackson a fair chance to earn their votes. He suggested that too many members of the Jewish community could not look beyond comments that Jackson had allegedly made in 1979, in light of the Andrew Young incident:

I think that Mr. Jackson was never really given a chance because of those systemic problems that had arisen from the time of Andy to the time of the Jackson campaign. Whatever he said was hit upon and it was almost used as a whipping board in order to get the general public, not only the Jewish community but white America, as well as my good Christian mother, to think that Jesse was

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid , p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid



out in left field. There was an attempt to discredit Jesse's campaign and his basic platform.<sup>72</sup>

There was also concern that both the Jewish community and the press were not eager to forgive Jackson for his mistakes, even after he publically apologized for them. Some black respondents believed that although Jews encouraged Jackson to make amends for insensitive comments, many never really considered forgiving the candidate. One suggested:

Jesse was being treated as such a pariah. It became even worse when he made a very immature statement about Jewish people. Then, of course, came the denial, or at least the failure to admit up front, which exacerbated the problem and gave people some kind of legitimate reason to dislike and disavow him. However, I really felt the coverage reached its low point after he apologized and there was continual hounding, by both the press and the Jews. Then Farrakhan got into the act later. Clearly there was still the feeling that Jesse had not apologized enough. When people interviewed him it was very attacking, very accusatory, very angry. There was no mood for conciliation. I don't know what people really wanted.<sup>73</sup>

It seems clear that many of these black respondents accused members of the American Jewish community of being too sensitive to Jackson's alleged anti-Semitic remarks and associations with Louis Farrakhan. Jews

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 27.



seemed more concerned with Jackson's ties to the Nation of Islam than did members of the African-American community. The respondents seemed to suggest that Jews also overreacted to Jackson's "Hymie" remarks. Each of these respondent's remarks indicate that blacks and Jews differed significantly in their perceptions of Jackson's campaign.

Contributors to The Black Scholar, a journal of black studies and research, shared many of the same views about Jews during Jackson's bid for the presidency as did the Moment respondents. Frances M. Beal contends that members of the Jewish community were not necessarily concerned about Jackson's alleged anti-Semitism, but rather they were afraid of his stance on Israel and the Palestinians. Beal observes:

The main organized forces in the Jewish community were threatened not by Jackson's beliefs about Jews, but by his views on Israel and about race relations in the U.S. Jackson's Middle East position was an open challenge to the pro-Zionist assumptions that dominate the U.S. Jewish community and government policy. The challenge had teeth too. Jackson's black social base is the one sector of the U.S. population where support for the Palestinian cause outweighs support for Israel...<sup>74</sup>

Beal believed that as soon as Jackson offered new solutions to the current Middle East situation many American Jews immediately opposed him. Beal asserts that according to the Jewish position, " anyone criticizing Israeli

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<sup>74</sup> Frances M. Beal, "U.S. Politics Will Never Be The Same," The Black Scholar, Vol. 15, No. 5, September/October 1984, p. 14.



policy or showing sympathy for the Palestinians is a latent anti-Semite; anyone calling for a cutback in military aid to Israel is a dangerous anti-Semite.<sup>75</sup>

Another African-American author in the Black Scholar also tried to explain negative Jewish reactions to the Jackson campaign. Maulana Karenga suggests two significant reasons for Jewish hostility against Jackson. Many Jews felt that Jackson was anti-Jewish. The author explains that these feelings were acquired from a myriad of events. These include but were not exclusive to the "Hymie" incident, Jackson's relationship with Louis Farrakhan, the candidate's 1979 meeting with Yasir Arafat, and Jackson's continued support of Palestinian self-determination in the Middle East. The author suggests that the Palestinian question, "contributes to the bulk of the reasons Jackson is labeled anti-Jewish by the Jewish establishment and a large segment of the Jewish population, in fact what appears to be a majority."<sup>76</sup>

The other significant reason the author concludes was, "the Jewish establishment's feelings that Jackson is too independent and not respectful enough of past Jewish contributions to black struggle and the pivotal role Jewish leaders play in determining the success and/or failure of traditional black organizations and leaders."<sup>77</sup> Here the author discusses issues that

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Maulana Karenga, "Jesse Jackson And The Presidential Campaign: The Invitation And The Oppositions Of History," Black Scholar, Vol. 15, No. 5, September/October 1984, p. 65.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 66.



divide blacks and Jews. Although at one time the leadership of these two groups had worked together to form such organizations as the NAACP and the Urban League, today blacks and Jews argue over many issues. Affirmative action policies in schools and in the workplace pit many blacks against Jews.<sup>78</sup>

Both of these authors suggest that Jewish opposition to the Jackson candidacy was due in large part to the candidate's position on the Palestinian question. Karenga and Beal imply that Jewish support for Jesse Jackson would have been greater if he did not publically call for Palestinian self-determination. They seem to believe that Jewish distrust would emerge for any candidate who calls for new solutions to the Palestinian problem.

When the long primary season had ended Jackson found himself with approximately 11 percent of the total delegates to the Democratic National Convention.<sup>79</sup> When Jackson addressed the convention in San Francisco his words suggested that he understood the pain his campaign had caused. Jackson's speech had the largest television audience of any speech at either the 1984 Democratic or Republican Conventions.<sup>80</sup> Jackson called for healing and reconciliation. As he addressed this convention he also formally apologized for the pain that he caused during the campaign:

If, in my low moments, in word, deed, or attitude,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>79</sup> Jesse L. Jackson, Straight From The Heart, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid



through some error of temper, taste, or tone, I have caused anyone discomfort, created pain, or revived someone's fears, that was not my truest self. If there were occasions when my grape turned into a raisin and my joy bell lost its resonance, please forgive me. Charge it to my head and not to my heart. My head is so limited in its finitude, but my heart is boundless in its love for the human family. I am not a perfect servant.<sup>81</sup>

Jackson was clearly trying to make amends with this introduction. Was he already thinking about the 1988 Presidential race? Were these words directed primarily at members of the Jewish community? A few minutes later Jackson directly addressed this issue. Jackson recalled the special alliance that many blacks and Jews had once felt and the deterioration of that relationship:

Feelings have been hurt on both sides. There is a crisis in communications. Confusion is in the air, but we cannot afford to lose our way. We may agree to agree, or agree to disagree on issues, but we must bring back civility to the tensions. We are co-partners in a long and rich religious history, the Judeo-Christian traditions.....We are bound by Moses and Jesus, but also connected with Islam and Mohammed. We are bound by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Heschel crying out from their graves for us to reach common ground....We must turn from finger pointing to clasped hands. We must share our burdens and our joys with each other once again. We must turn to each

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<sup>81</sup> Jesse Jackson, "Democratic National Convention Address," San Francisco, California, July 17, 1984, (as cited in Straight From The Heart, p. 3.)



other and not on each other.<sup>82</sup>

With these words Jackson attempted to understand the deep rifts that his campaign had caused members of the black and Jewish communities. When Jackson commented that blacks and Jews must bring back civility to the tensions that divided them, he was trying to distance himself from Louis Farrakhan's harsh rhetoric. Jackson's associations with Farrakhan had caused much distrust of the candidate in the Jewish community. Jackson's references to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel evoked a time when blacks and Jews had worked together. Jackson hoped that both communities could come together again. Jackson suggested that the task was one not too great to embark upon.

Jackson's 1984 bid for the presidency exacerbated already uneasy tensions between blacks and Jews in the public arena. When Jackson referred to Jews as "Hymies" in the middle of the campaign he reignited much of the deep distrust that Jews had felt for Jackson in 1979. The Jewish media sharply criticized Jackson's words. Many blacks seemed to think that Jews were being overly sensitive to a comment made during a private conversation. Jackson's associations with Louis Farrakhan further tarnished his image among American Jews. Jews felt that by aligning himself with the head of the Nation of Islam, Jackson embraced Farrakhan's ideologies.

In the middle of the campaign Jackson sought to distance himself from

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 6.



the words of Louis Farrakhan. But this action did little to convince Jews to vote for Jesse Jackson. Many Jews believed that Jackson was an anti-Semite and that they should stay far away from his campaign. Jackson evoked fear and distrust among American Jews. Many Jews were afraid of, among other things, what would happen to America's special relationship with Israel if Jackson was successful in his bid for the Presidency.

As he addressed the Democratic National Convention Jackson urged reconciliation between the African-American and Jewish-American communities. He hoped that blacks and Jews would come together to try to rebuild their once successful coalition. Jackson sought to pursue that vision in the future.



## Chapter IV

### Jackson Runs Again: 1988

Jesse Jackson's speech to the 1984 Democratic National Convention was still fresh in the minds of many American Jews, when a year later newspapers reported that Jackson had spoken to an audience of some fifty thousand people in Berlin on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. President Ronald Reagan had used this same occasion to visit the graves of S. S. troops at a cemetery in Bitburg.<sup>1</sup>

Jackson saw Reagan's blunder as a chance to speak out against racism in the world. He observed with sadness that hatred had been the cause of an estimated fifty million human deaths. He challenged President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev to sign arms control agreements for the betterment of mankind. Jackson also explained that he had met with Rabbi Heinz Galensky, the head of the Jewish community in West Berlin:

We agreed that blacks and Jews, have in common the necessity to fight racism and anti-Semitism. We agreed that Israel has a right to exist with security within internationally recognized boundaries. We agreed that there will be no peace without Palestinian justice.....and we agreed to condemn the revival of racism and anti-Semitism in the U.S and Europe in the aftermath of Bitburg.<sup>2</sup>

Was this meeting with Rabbi Galensky an attempt by Jackson to begin to

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<sup>1</sup> Straight From The Heart, p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 254



heal strained black/Jewish relations in the United States? Had Jackson planned this conversation as a staged media event for the benefit of his own political standing? Jewish opinions were divided on this question. Later in the year newspapers reported that Jesse Jackson was in Geneva pressing Mikhail Gorbachev on human rights issues, including the plight of Soviet Jewry. Israel Levine of the AJC praised Jackson's efforts, "we commend him for his persistence in pressing the issue, despite Mr. Gorbachev's effort to sidetrack it, and his eloquence in projecting the views of all Americans on this issue."<sup>3</sup>

Jewish publications were also quick to praise Jackson's interest. Yet many were skeptical of his real motivations. Was Jackson toying with the American Jewish community or did these actions represent a fundamental change in his relationship with Jews? A popular black weekly magazine even reported that Jackson's "Mini-Summit" with Gorbachev brought praise from Jewish groups.<sup>4</sup> Jackson would refer to these two events throughout his 1988 bid for the Presidency as proof of his interest and goodwill towards the American Jewish community.

A year and a half later Jesse Jackson was again a candidate for President of the United States. As a guest on "Donahue" on May 2, 1987 Jackson responded to questions about this latest bid for the highest office in the land. As Phil Donahue introduced Jackson he quoted an article by

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<sup>3</sup> "Rev Jackson's Mini-Summit With Gorbachev Brings Praise From Jewish Group, Jet, Vol. 69, No. 13, December 9, 1985, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



Richard Cohn of the Washington Post to the candidate:

The rhetoric of Jackson's last campaign has apparently been forgotten. The empathetic hug he gave PLO chairman Yasir Arafat has been purged from memory....and so too it seems was Jackson's moral collapse in the face of anti-Semitism of his political ally, Louis Farrakhan.<sup>5</sup>

Had American Jews forgiven Jackson for his indiscretions during the 1984 presidential campaign? Richard Cohn suggested that this might be so, although his references to these troubling memories indicated that they might not have been completely forgotten. By mentioning them within his introduction Phil Donahue seemed to be indicating that these issues were as important to Jews as ever. Donahue asserted that not unlike others who had gone before him and sought the presidency, Jackson had shadows following after him. The candidate was quick to address Donahue's statements. He told the audience that he knew his career had seen both highs and lows:

All of us must be judged finally not just by our strikeouts but by our home runs. Really, it's an accumulative box score and our presidents, congresspeople, our senators are not much unlike us. They make a commitment to try to serve in a certain role and to make a difference. And those issues, the highs and the lows of my life, have been subjected to substantial public scrutiny and they will continue to be so.<sup>6</sup>

Jackson was referring to many of the alleged anti-Semitic incidents that

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<sup>5</sup> "Donahue," Transcript No. 05287, Multimedia Entertainment, Inc., May 2, 1987, p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



plagued his 1984 bid for the Presidency. Jackson acknowledged that no matter how much he might want some of these issues to disappear they would always be with him.

Although almost three years had passed since Jackson delivered his apologetic speech to the 1984 Democratic National Convention, questions raised by Phil Donahue's audience indicated that voters remained uneasy about the candidate's presidential ambitions. A guest in the audience asked Jackson about anti-Semitism. This audience member questioned the candidate as to what he had done to dispel his anti-Semitic image. Jackson responded to the question by confirming its validity and its relevance. Jackson seemed to understand that his alleged anti-Semitic feelings were still on the minds of many voters. He answered by explaining that he would be speaking to the National Conference of Christians and Jews later that evening. He also noted other efforts that he had made in recent years to allay Jewish concerns about his candidacy.

Last year I went with a cross-section of groups to Geneva and confronted Gorbachev on the question of human rights within the Soviet Union as a measure of how you judge the character of the nation. We've done mass meetings with Rabbi Mark Tannenbaum at Queens College here in New York. All that you can really do is keep reaching out. And if you do your best, people tend to respond.<sup>7</sup>

Jackson hoped that Jewish voters would respond to his efforts to embrace

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.  
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causes that were important to them. He seemed to understand that unless he went out of his way to court their friendship and to make amends for past mistakes, then Jewish voters would simply snub his candidacy.

A guest on Donahue also asked Jackson about whether or not he would support the government of the State of Israel if he were elected President. Jackson reiterated his often-voiced position that the security of Israel must be guaranteed. He also spoke of the rights of the Palestinians. Jackson tried to address both issues throughout his campaign:

They [Palestinians] also deserve some place to stay because if they are forever nomads, if they never have a place to live, then you're set up for eternal war. And then we should normalize ties with the Arab world.<sup>8</sup>

Another guest brought up Jackson's relationships with Yasir Arafat and Louis Farrakahn. Immediately he tried to distance himself from these two individuals. At first he answered by saying that he had not seen Arafat in eight years. Then he defended his visit with the PLO chairman. He explained that the visit was to challenge Arafat to recognize Israel, even as the Palestine Liberation Organization's chairman fought for his own rights in the Middle East:

Meeting people who disagree with us, as well as those who agree with us, is the leadership thing to do. If our leaders have not met with our adversaries, how can they move us toward peace?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



Jackson also said that he had not met with Farrakhan for several years. He tried to change the subject by claiming that Farrakhan was not involved in his campaign.

Phil Donahue also asked about the Farrakhan relationship. He alleged that Jackson was distancing himself from the head of the Nation of Islam to advance his political aspirations. Donahue observed:

there are not a few Americans who want you just to say out loud that you are distancing yourself from this man's apparent relentless effort to, at the very least, convey the notion or the sentiment of anti-Semitism.<sup>10</sup>

Jackson responded to Donahue's allegations by affirming his commitment to eradicate anti-Semitism and racism everywhere. He reminded the audience that he publically decried anti-Semitism during his 1984 address to the Democratic National Convention. Jackson also added that his address was seen by the largest TV audience in American history.

One member of the audience stood up and spoke his mind:

Reverend Jackson, can you please settle this matter once and for all. How do you expect the Jewish voters of the United States of America to vote for you unless you totally renounce Louis Farrakhan?<sup>11</sup>

After the audience applauded for a few moments Jackson skirted the issue. He explained that it was a mistake to keep putting so much emphasis on that issue. He tried to dodge the question,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



If we keep making that a central issue, and for example do not put into focus the amount of arms Israel is sending to South Africa. That's also a critical issue. But we would make a mistake if we made arm sales to South Africa, which we disagree with, the centerpiece, or if we made some of Farrakhan's statements the centerpiece.<sup>12</sup>

This did not seem to allay the concerns of the questioner. He accused Jackson of evading the issue. The guest apparently thought that he spoke for many members of the American Jewish Community when he expressed the sentiment that Jewish voters would not be able to trust a candidate who refused to distance himself from an immoral man. The audience member continued to press Jackson on the Farrakhan question. Finally Jackson responded, "I take the position that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God and let he who is without sin throw the first rock."<sup>13</sup>

These questions posed to the candidate on the Donahue show seemed to indicate that many of the issues that plagued the Jackson candidacy in 1984 had not yet disappeared. Some voters were still concerned about Jackson's ties to Louis Farrakhan, even though the candidate claimed to have distanced himself from the leader of the Nation of Islam. Jackson's perceived anti-Semitic image also remained a problem. Although Jackson tried to convince voters that he had worked hard to improve his relationship with Jews over the past few years, questions asked of Jackson

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid



suggested that some voters remained weary of his assertions.

In order to better educate the American Jewish voter about the latest Jackson bid for the White House, the November/December 1987 edition of Tikkun featured a lengthy interview with the candidate. Jackson answered questions on a wide range of issues that were of particular importance to the American Jewish community. Many of these dealt with the State of Israel. When asked if he was less critical of Israel now than he was before his 1984 bid for the presidency Jackson responded negatively. He claimed that his position toward Israel had not changed. He explained that he had always supported Israel's right to exist as well as for a state for the Palestinian people. He acknowledged America's vital interest in the Jewish State, but also recognized that America had other vital interests in the Middle East that needed to be addressed.<sup>14</sup>

When asked if he thought that Jews were being reasonable when they repeatedly pressed him to renounce Louis Farrakhan, the candidate stated that incidents involving the Islamic leader had been overblown,

On one level there's been an overreaction to Farrakhan, as if Farrakhan has state power. He does not. So there is a certain exaggeration in the reaction. You....should also deal with what has been Farrakhan's public explanation about Hitler: that he was saying he was great to his people. That was not an adjective I would use; Hitler was wicked to the world, wicked, immoral, sinful.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "A Dialogue with Jesse Jackson," Tikkun, Vol. 2, No. 5, November/December 1987, pp. 35-36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



When asked a second time why he could not bring himself to disassociate with Farrakhan, Jackson responded angrily. He listed many of the things he had done to show his support for American Jewry. He explained that he had gone to Skokie when the Nazis were going to march there. In addition he noted that,

when Gorbachev was talking disarmament I confronted him about Soviet Jewry. I was there, and before sixty million people at the democratic convention I restated my position. I am not going to wallow in that. I have no need for it, and no one else who wants to go forward should have a need to go back into that.<sup>16</sup>

When asked why Jews should support his candidacy Jackson emphasized several key issues. He challenged anyone who cared about affordable housing, health care and the quality of life in America to vote for him. He reiterated his record on social justice and his fights for civil rights for all Americans. He spoke about his visions for peace in the Middle East. He implored those people who were interested in new solutions for the Middle East to vote for him.

If those progressive Jews want somebody with the courage and the intelligence to fight for a comprehensive Middle East peace plan, rather than a series of war plans, I will engage in that process, and in my experience I have met with enough of our allies and adversaries to be able to make a real difference.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 42.



Jackson strongly supported an autonomous Palestinian State. He believed that his ties to leaders in the Arab world would help him negotiate such an agreement, as well as lasting peace in the Middle East. On several occasions Jackson journeyed to the Middle East to try to influence key leaders on policy positions. In his well publicized visit with Yasir Arafat in 1979, Jackson claimed to have pressed the PLO Chairman to end terrorist attacks against Israel and to recognize the Jewish State. Jackson also traveled to Damascus in 1983 to seek the release of US Navy Lt. Robert Goodman from a Syrian prison. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad agreed to Jackson's request.<sup>18</sup>

When questioned about whether he had challenged anti-Semitism on college campuses, when he had found it among black students, Jackson replied that he had found no black anti-Semitism on the college campuses he had visited. He urged students to engage in dialogue over the issues that divided them, particularly those that created tensions around

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<sup>18</sup> On December 29, 1983 Jackson and thirteen other private citizens, including Minister Louis Farrakhan, journeyed to Damascus, Syria to seek the release of US Navy Lt. Robert Goodman who was being held hostage in a Syrian prison. Goodman was shot down over Syria as he traveled to Lebanon on a bombing mission. Jackson and his contingent hoped to convince Hafez al-Assad to release the airman on humanitarian grounds. On January 3, 1984 Goodman was released from prison. (Jesse Jackson & The Politics Of Race, p. 202-203.)



affirmative action and the Bakke decision.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the interview Jackson stressed that Jews and blacks must come together to dialogue. He reiterated how he and his family had gone to Skokie to support the Jewish citizens of that town, heavily settled by Holocaust survivors, when Nazis demonstrated there. Jackson wanted the American Jewish voter to know that he was not anti-Semitic.<sup>20</sup>

In the same issue of Tikkun several prominent American Jews voiced their opinions about Jackson's comments in the interview. Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations Religious Action Center, praised Jackson's efforts over the past three years to try to better understand the sensitivities of the American Jewish community. Yet he argued that in the Tikkun interview Jackson expressed misunderstanding about the Jewish view on affirmative action, on the Holocaust, and on the situation in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup> Saperstein concluded:

from the Jewish community's perspective, Jackson's 'transformation' was by no means complete. He still refused to criticize Farrakhan directly....He still

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<sup>19</sup>Bakke, a 34 year old white Protestant male, charged that he was denied admission to the University of California Medical School at Davis due to an affirmative action program in place. In order to diversify its student body the university established a two-tier admission policy. On one tier sixteen spaces were set aside for minority students. In the other tier students were accepted based solely on their academic qualifications. Bakke, who was denied admission, alleged that he had a better academic record than many of the students accepted on the alternate tier. He filed a reverse discrimination suit against Davis Medical School claiming he was discriminated against because he was a white male. In 1973 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Bakke arguing that the quota system set in place by Davis Medical School was unconstitutional. Blacks and Jews were bitterly divided over this issue. (Albert Vorspan, "Blacks and Jews: Friends or Foes," Keeping Posted, Vol 25, No. 1, October 1, 1979, p. 6)

<sup>20</sup>"A Dialogue With Jesse Jackson," p. 44.

<sup>21</sup>David Saperstein, "Reflections On The Dialogue With Jackson," Tikkun, Vol. 2, No. 5, November/December 1987, p. 47.



manifested a disturbing discomfort with these lingering divisive issues. But, on the whole, Jackson's positions were a vast, vast improvement over those espoused in the 1984 campaign, and they must be recognized as such.<sup>22</sup>

Fred Siegel described the interview in more negative terms. He was not ready to trust the 1988 Jackson campaign fully:

If the Tikkun interview suggests that Jackson is very reluctant to separate himself from Farrakhan's version of black nationalism, it also shows the "newest Jackson", one who seeks to minimize his political liabilities through a dialogue with Jews. This detente of sorts has been highlighted by Jackson's somewhat incoherent thirty-second question to Gorbachev on the plight of Soviet Jews, a passing gesture which cost him nothing. If I'm grudging in my account of this very brief event, it's because so much else of what Jackson did indicated that his outreach to Jews was little more than a tactical ploy.<sup>23</sup>

Ann Lewis, a Democratic strategist and commentator, seemed the least critical of the latest Jackson campaign. She explained how she had watched Jesse Jackson's relations with the Jewish community evolve over the past few years. She indicated that he had made himself available throughout this time period to respond to concerns about his positions from American-Jewish leaders. Without specifically mentioning particular areas of agreement, Lewis acknowledged that there were more issues that both

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> Fred Siegel, "Reflections On The Dialogue With Jackson," Tikkun, Vol. 2, No. 5, November/December 1987, p. 49.



the candidate and the Jewish community agreed upon than they disagreed upon. One of the disagreements between Jackson and the American-Jewish community was the candidate's relationship to Louis Farrakhan. Lewis attempted to explain Jewish distrust of Jackson around this issue.

In the Jewish experience, any overt expression of anti-Semitism must be taken very seriously indeed. The world, including some Jews, ignored the anti-Semitic rantings of Adolf Hitler; we have learned never to take such comments lightly again. We may have had to distinguish between public and private attitudes.....but about public statements the lines were clear. Anyone who spoke that out loud was an enemy; how much worse their private thoughts must be.<sup>24</sup>

Lewis compared these anti-Semitic sentiments to anti-black remarks. She explained that in the black understanding of overcoming hatred a different standard applies. She remarked that African-American organizations that work for economic progress, or black civil rights lobbyists that seek new legislation, encounter individuals of all political beliefs.<sup>25</sup> In many of these fights for better opportunities, "because so much of the current American power structure held and openly expressed racist attitudes in recent decades, black strategists overlook past comments and work for present gains."<sup>26</sup> In her opinion Jews feel that they cannot afford to look beyond openly anti-Semitic comments. Jews do

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<sup>24</sup> Ann Lewis, "Reflections On The Dialogue With Jackson," *Tikkun*, Vol. 2, No. 5, November/December 1987, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid



not wait for things to get better.<sup>27</sup> Six million Jews who perished during World War II waited for things to get better.

Other Jewish commentators also remained hesitant about Jackson's ties to the head of the Nation of Islam and the perceived threat that this relationship engendered. One commentator, Julius Lester, an African-American Jew by choice and a professor of Afro-American and Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts, analyzed a different issue in Jackson's Tikkun interview in Hadassah Magazine. Lester wrote that although Jackson spoke with great compassion on a number of important Jewish issues, he also spoke without compassion on an equal number of issues that were important to the Jewish voter. Lester tried to understand the current situation between Jackson and the American Jews.

Jackson will never be what we would like him to be: one who is wholly committed to Israel, who feels in his heart that Israel is our heart. We wonder why it is that Jackson seems to feel the pain of the Palestinians more acutely than the pain of the Jews. This is especially baffling when so many of us feel the pain of the Palestinians even as we feel our own.<sup>28</sup>

Lester believed that Jews were troubled that Jackson could easily empathize with black suffering but had more difficulty empathizing with Jewish suffering.<sup>29</sup> In contrast the author asserted Jews were able to feel

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Julius Lester, "The Trouble With Jackson," Hadassah Magazine, Vol. 69, No. 7, March 1988, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid



the pain of their own suffering as well as the pain of others.

Lester acknowledged that Jewish interests and black interests were in conflict:

American blacks cannot but resent the billions of dollars in aid the United States Government supplies to Israel, while the few Federal programs that provide some help to blacks are cut back or eliminated. One hears that resentment in some of Jackson's pronouncements about Israel and Jews.<sup>30</sup>

Lester wrote that Jackson's veiled anger was misdirected:

It is Jackson who formulates the issue in such a way that Israel is subtly blamed for black poverty in Amercia. In an interview in Tikkun, Jackson said, "Israel is subsidized by America, which includes black Americans' tax money, and then it [Israel] subsidizes South Africa." <sup>31</sup>

Lester called these comments "pure Jackson".<sup>32</sup> He seemed to suggest that Jackson often twists around the truth to suit his own purposes. Lester pointed out that while some of black American tax money did go to subsidize Israel, unless the United States broke all ties with South Africa, the tax money of blacks in America would also go to support apartheid.<sup>33</sup>

In a Baltimore Jewish Times article James Besser interviewed members of the American-Jewish community who expressed their opinions about the latest Jackson campaign. An analyst with a Washington D.C. political

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



action committee believed that no one would ever forget about Jackson's relationship with Louis Farrakhan:

Feelings are too strong; nobody is able to forget his ties to Farrakhan, which he still refuses to repudiate; very few people in this community, in my view, have either the desire or the ability to get close to the Jackson campaign. Again in my view, there's very little confidence that such a process would even work.<sup>34</sup>

This same respondent argued that Jackson's new moderate views on the Middle East situation were, "a matter of style, not substance."<sup>35</sup> According to Mark Siegel, a Jewish Democratic activist, "we have done nothing as a community to Jesse Jackson, but he has done a great deal that's substantively offensive to American Jews and Israel."<sup>36</sup> Siegel suggested that Jews who urged reconciliation with Jackson were doing so out of fear. James Besser explained that Jackson was putting together a coalition that was not heavily dependent on Jewish support. The author noted that, "for the first time, a successful campaign was being waged without an active effort to gain the blessing of the pro-Israel community."<sup>37</sup>

In the same article Besser interviewed David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center. Saperstein hoped that the gap

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<sup>34</sup> James D. Besser, "Is The Jackson Gap Too Wide To Bridge?", Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 179, No. 8, April 15, 1988, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid



which existed between Jackson and members of the American Jewish community could be closed. He offered several suggestions:

A wise and politically effective response requires an ability not only to criticize him when he says things inimical to Jewish concerns, but to actively encourage him when he does things that reflect an effort to reach out to the Jewish community.

We're very good at the first thing, not so good at the second.<sup>38</sup>

Saperstein added that the stakes were very high for a positive relationship between Jews and Jackson. He suggested that Jews did not have to like Jesse Jackson as a candidate, but rather that they must understand that Jackson represented the highest aspirations for many members of the African-American community. According to Saperstein, "The Jewish community has to interact with Jackson not only as an individual, but as this symbol."<sup>39</sup>

A front page article in the B'nai B'rith Messenger, submitted by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, offered a different kind of advice. The Wiesenthal Center warned Jews not to vote for Jesse Jackson. The article admitted that although Jackson had matured politically since his 1984 run for the presidency, Jews should be wary of this man. The Wiesenthal Center believed that Jews should be greatly concerned about Jackson's ideas regarding the Middle East:

Whenever Jesse Jackson has ventured into the Middle East equation, it has always been to befriend an enemy of Israel:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid



Syria's Assad, Libya's Khadaffi and the PLO's Arafat. Jesse Jackson could never find a public platform from which to criticize the Syrians for their human rights abuses, the PLO for what it has done to Lebanon, the Arab League for its failure to help their brothers and sisters in the appalling refugee camps.....the cumulative effect of all that, combined with his relationship to Louis Farrakhan, his Hymietown slur, his denigration of the Holocaust, together constitute the only public record that Jesse Jackson has on the Jewish agenda.<sup>40</sup>

Most Jewish voters remained wary about Jackson's latest bid for the White House. Yet his liberal message of inclusion seemed to reach a rainbow coalition of blacks, minorities, women, and working class whites.<sup>41</sup> Jackson survived the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary and finished strongly on Tuesday March 8, the day referred to as Super Tuesday, when several Southern states hold their primaries on the same day.<sup>42</sup> Jackson garnered almost one-quarter of the total vote on that Tuesday. A week later Jackson finished in second place in Illinois. On March 26 Jackson was victorious in the Michigan caucuses.<sup>43</sup>

Jackson's victory in Michigan and second place showing in Illinois seemed to legitimize this African-American's bid for the Presidency. This deeply concerned Jews who opposed his candidacy. Subsequent defeats in

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<sup>40</sup> "Wiesenthal Center Warns Jews Not To Vote For Jackson," B'nai B'rith Messenger, Vol. 91, No. 15, April 15, 1988, pp. 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth D. Wald, "Ministering To The Nation: The Campaigns Of Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson," in Nominating The President, Emmett H. Buell, Jr., Lee Sigelman, Editors. (Tennessee: University Of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. 126.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid



the New York, Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania primaries dashed Jackson's hopes of being a serious contender.<sup>44</sup> Yet despite losing most of the primary battles Jackson had emerged as a major player in American politics.

Why was Jackson more successful in his 1988 bid for the Presidency than he was in 1984? Unlike in 1984, when he was accused of fraternizing with and consulting with Louis Farrakhan, during this election most of the secular media described Jackson as a "new" moderate. Because of this "new image" he garnered many more votes. In the National Review John McLaughlin explained,

Jackson has begun to clean up his act. He has stopped publically calling for aid to the Sandinistas, and for diplomatic relations with Cuba, and he has begun aggressively pushing a domestic agenda that promotes increased spending for education and for infrastructure programs, his current theme being economic justice for all.<sup>45</sup>

Time reported that in this bid for the Presidency the nation was taking Jackson seriously.<sup>46</sup> The Washington Spectator also called Jackson a new moderate:

With a degree of difficulty we will never know, he has kept his most obvious impulses to radicalism in check, largely freeing himself of guilt by association....No more

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> John McLaughlin, "Jackson the Moderate," National Review, Vol. 39, No. 13, p. 24, July 17, 1987.

<sup>46</sup> "Taking Jesse Seriously," Time, April 11, 1988, p. 12.



Valentines to Arafat. And most conspicuously, there have been no more bear hugs for Minister Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader who proved so inconvenient in 1984.<sup>47</sup>

These descriptions of Jackson as "moderate" throughout his campaign heightened the fears of Jews who still felt uneasy about the candidate's bid for the Presidency. Although the secular media might have suggested that Jackson changed, many Jews still remained distrustful of Jackson. Throughout the primary season these Jews were concerned that if Jackson was seen as a legitimate candidate by mainstream American voters, then he might be successful in his run.

Some right wing Jewish organizations did not classify the Jackson candidacy as moderate. One group, calling itself the Coalition For A Positive America, paid for advertisements in the New York Times before the New York primary, which asked the question, "What do you know about the man who may dictate the 1988 Democratic platform or may even be the party's presidential candidate?" Below these bold faced words the coalition listed every alleged anti-Semitic event that Jackson had been involved in since 1979. The advertisement accused the candidate of being pro-Third World, anti-American, pro-Arab League, pro-PLO, and therefore anti-Israel.<sup>48</sup> According to Time, the chairman of the coalition, New York Assemblyman Dov Hilkind, publically endorsed Presidential

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Ferguson, "Jesse's Old Pals," The Washington Spectator, Vol. 21, No. 5, May 1988, p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> "Do You Know Jesse Jackson?", New York Times, April 15, 1988. p. ?



Candidate Al Gore because Gore spoke out the most effectively against Jackson.<sup>49</sup>

Another New Yorker who spoke out against Jesse Jackson before the New York primary, although not nearly as vehemently as the Coalition For A Positive America, was New York City Mayor Ed Koch. During an April 1, 1988 press conference Koch asserted that Jews would be crazy to vote for Jesse Jackson for President. Koch's words were printed in newspapers and magazines all over America. Some black organizations castigated Koch for this remark. Representative Charles Rangel, a leading black public official in New York, wondered what gave Koch the right to speak for all Jews.<sup>50</sup> In the New York Daily News he objected to the, "inflammatory way Koch framed the issue. And the unspoken assumption that Jews should think and act as one, or that Jews should think only as Jews, not also as Americans."<sup>51</sup>

Koch tried to defend himself from the negative publicity he received after his remarks. In The New Republic Koch wrote:

On April 1, during an impromptu press interview, I made some comments pertaining to Jesse Jackson. I said, "He thinks maybe Jews and other supporters of Israel should vote for him, they have got to be crazy!" In the same way they'd be crazy if they were black and voted for someone who was praising Botha and the racist supporters of the South African administration....He (Jackson) has two

<sup>49</sup> "Big Apple Showdown," Time, April 18, 1988, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Edward I. Koch, "Koch Has No Regrets," B'nai B'rith Messenger, Vol. 91, No. 18, May 6, 1988, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid



standards, and they're not my standards.<sup>52</sup>

He explained that since his negative comments about Jackson many people had praised him for speaking out against Jackson. Others condemned him.

Yet he made clear that he would not withdraw a single word:

the media and the candidates have treated Jackson in a patronizing way. They have not asked him any of the tough questions. They have allowed him to obfuscate and decline to answer. I understand how much the Jackson candidacy means to black Americans, and I recognize that my pointed criticism has distressed many. But I believe that Jackson is a serious candidate, and must be treated seriously.<sup>53</sup>

Apparently Koch believed that he was doing the citizens of New York a favor by making such a comment about the Jewish community and Jesse Jackson. Author Norman Mailer disagreed. He wrote an editorial for the New York Times saying that he was one of those "crazies" who would support Jesse Jackson for President.<sup>54</sup> He suggested that voters should look beyond the "hymietown" remarks of 1984 and not dwell too long on the Arafat and Farrakhan issues. Mailer expressed his support for Jackson in this way:

Jesse Jackson is not perfect. I have no idea if I would like him if I knew him.....I do not know if I trust Jackson altogether. So what? The same may be said for Bush, Dukakis, and Gore. What does count for me is that

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<sup>52</sup> Edward Koch, "The Mayor Defends Himself," New Republic, May 16, 1988, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Norman Mailer, "Jackson Is a Friend Of Life's Victims," New York Times, April 18, 1988.



Jackson offers a cogent sense of of sympathy for human suffering. He can appreciate the paucity of identity among the underprivileged. Of all our candidates, he speaks to our powerful passion for human promise and improvement.<sup>55</sup>

In the spring of 1988, on the day of the New York State primary, Jackson made another guest appearance on "Donahue." Phil Donahue and his audience fired a wide range of questions at the Presidential candidate. Donahue asked Jackson how he felt about Koch's remark that Jews would be crazy to vote for him. Jackson responded that those kinds of remarks would not contribute to mending divisions between many blacks and Jews.

I'm glad that it was made clear by a significant amount of leaders who are Jewish, that does not represent their point of view. We should not be giving religious and racial litmus tests in the campaign.<sup>56</sup>

Several audience members identified themselves as Jews before they asked their questions. One individual told Jackson that he had just voted for him a few hours before. In this man's opinion Jackson was the only candidate with a policy for Israel and her neighbors in the Middle East.

I think that you're the only candidate that I have heard that actually has a policy for that area of the world. I don't think that a yarmulke is a policy and I don't think that a Jewish wife takes the place of a real policy.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> "Donahue," Transcript No. 041988, Multimedia Entertainment, Inc., April 19, 1988, p. 1

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 5.



When asked if he was concerned whether his embrace of Yasir Arafat in 1979 might influence the election results, Jackson denied any concern. He said that the Pope had met with Arafat as well. Another question came from a student at Yeshiva University. This individual told Jackson that Jews should accept his apology for the "Hymie" incident in 1984 and forgive him. Yet the student pressed Jackson further. He asked if Jews like him were being asked to forgive the candidate for making a joke or for just not liking the Jewish people.

Jackson answered that the joke had been in poor taste:

I expressed my regrets for anyone who felt hurt, who felt pain, which is the normal and human and right thing to do. In the course of our relationships as human beings, we must have the strength to forgive each other, to redeem each other and move on.<sup>58</sup>

Jackson used this theme of forgiveness many times in his bid for the Presidency in 1988 when he spoke to Jewish groups. He hoped that they would look beyond incidents in 1984 and forgive him for past mistakes. In addition, he never let Jewish voters forget that he had talked with Gorbachev in 1985 about the plight of Soviet Jewry. He also reminded them that when President Reagan traveled to Bitburg Cemetery to lay a wreath, he spoke out against anti-Semitism and racism. Sometimes when an individual asked a question that did not seem at all related to his

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 6.



“Jewish activities” he still touted these self-declared achievements.<sup>59</sup>

An African-American woman in the audience of “Donahue” was irritated when the subject of “Hymies” was brought up. She said that blacks had been called a lot worse things than Hymie. Jackson responded,

I think that it is important to relieve people of their fears, try to heal people, try to make people feel hopeful. How do you do that except to keep on trying. For example, when Reagan went to Bitburg to lay a wreath where SS troops lay, Nazis, I went to Stutthof concentration camp to show my respect and concern. When Reagan met with Gorbachev discussing stop deploying missiles...I met with Gorbachev also and challenged him before the whole world, to free Soviet Jewry and Armenians, because the absence of missiles is not the absence of human rights.<sup>60</sup>

A New York Times survey of Jackson supporters in Queens, New York reported that other blacks were also tired of reliving the 1984 Hymie controversy in 1988. One respondent said that just as Jackson was showing real strength in the primaries there was a return to Hymietown.<sup>61</sup> Another supporter believed that he had already paid his dues on this issue. She added, “What are you going to have to do? You are going to have to hear this all your life?”<sup>62</sup> Another voter wondered why Mayor Koch was not challenged for his assertions that Jews would have to be

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp.7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> “For Jackson Voters In Queens, Pride And A Bit Of Trepidation,” New York Times, April 5, 1988, p. B7.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid



crazy to vote for Jackson. He argued that if people were going to treat Jackson in one way then they should treat Koch in the exact same manner.

Jewish hostility towards Jackson seemed to exacerbate tensions between blacks and Jews. Throughout the 1988 Presidential campaign the media continued to scrutinize black/Jewish relations. Some blacks voters believed that members of the Jewish community would never forget Jackson's past mistakes. Many Jewish voters could not bring themselves to forgive Jackson's past remarks, even though the candidate seemed to have apologized for his indiscretions on many occasions.

In addition to these animosities, black/Jewish tensions further escalated in Chicago during the spring and summer of 1988. Relations between the two groups became strained when it was reported that an aide to Chicago Mayor Eugene Sawyer had delivered anti-Semitic lectures at the headquarters of the Nation Of Islam from 1985 to 1987.<sup>63</sup> The aide, Steve Cokely, accused Jewish doctors of infecting African-American babies with HIV. He also warned Muslim audiences of a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.<sup>64</sup>

Many blacks and many Jews were outraged at these accusations. When asked to comment on Cokely's anti-Semitic rantings, Jesse Jackson said that he and other leaders in the black community had repeatedly spoken out against anti-Semitism. He added that he did not know Cokely and that

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<sup>63</sup> Dirk Johnson, "Black-Jewish Hostility Rouses Leaders In Chicago To Action," New York Times, July 29, 1988, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



people should consider the source and move on.<sup>65</sup> Jackson also expressed his belief that anti-Semitism among blacks had been exaggerated. Jackson then brought Mayor Koch into the discussion. Addressing an apparent double standard he said, "I don't see anyone holding press conferences condemning Koch."<sup>66</sup>

Although he had repeatedly denounced anti-Semitism throughout his campaign, editorials blasted Jackson for not using his influence among black Americans to denounce Cokely's allegations about Jews. One of the most critical was written by Eugene Kennedy, a professor of psychology at Loyola University of Chicago:

Virulent anti-Semitism has gripped Chicago's black community. Nobody morally powerful enough to try to combat it, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who lives here has attempted to do so....Mr. Jackson rightfully presents himself as a keeper of the nation's conscience. Why has he remained silent? As he campaigns for Gov. Michael S. Dukakis, what conclusions can Jewish voters in Chicago, across the nation, draw from that silence?<sup>67</sup>

Alongside this opinion piece questioning Jackson's silence in the New York Times, readers found an article about Jackson by columnist A. M. Rosenthal. In this piece the author described how Jackson had called him

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. B6.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Eugene Kennedy, "Anti-Semitism In Chicago: A Stunning Silence," New York Times, July 26, 1988, p. A21.



at his home to protest what he had written in a previous column. In the first article Rosenthal had described the Jackson campaign as a "fountain of demagogic rhetoric."<sup>68</sup> The columnist explained how Jackson turned his passions for causes on and off like a faucet:

He prides himself on reaching out to Cubans, Koreans, Mexicans, just about everybody, but has never found it in him to reach out so eagerly to Jews. A great many American Jews fear him and also quite correctly because his warmth for the PLO can be a livid danger to Israel.<sup>69</sup>

In this article Rosenthal described Jackson's anger at what he had written in a previous article. He reported that Jackson had given him familiar examples of many of the times that he had reached out to American Jews. Jackson mentioned his speech during the 1984 Democratic National Convention, he recalled his meeting with Gorbachev in 1985, and he also described his trip to a concentration camp in Germany that same year. He also asserted that other ethnic groups reached out more to him than did the Jews.<sup>70</sup>

Rosenthal described Jackson's adamant declarations that he was not antagonistic to Jews. He claimed that he had tried to reach out to Jews constantly and was not ceasing these activities. Jackson told the columnist that he believed it was only right for readers of the New York Times to

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<sup>68</sup> A. M. Rosenthal, "Jackson's Real Campaign," New York Times, July 19, 1988, p. A31

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> A. M. Rosenthal, "A Call From Mr. Jackson," New York Times, July 26, 1988, p. A21



hear what he had just explained over the phone.<sup>71</sup> Jackson wanted Rosenthal to understand that he was trying to reach out to Jews. He hoped the columnist would help him disseminate this message.

At the end of the primary season at least some of Jackson's assertions that he had reached out to Jewish voters were probably correct. More Jews voted for Jackson for President in 1988 than did in 1984. A National Review survey illustrated Jewish perceptions of Jackson. When Jewish voters were asked in 1984 if they thought Jesse Jackson was anti-Semitic 75 percent responded yes, 8 percent responded no, and 18 percent responded that they were not sure.<sup>72</sup> When Jews were asked the same question in 1988 56 percent of the respondents believed that Jackson was anti-Semitic, 11 percent responded that he was not, and 33 percent said that they were not sure.<sup>73</sup> These statistics showed a marked change from certainty that Jackson was anti-Semitic to uncertainty whether he was anti-Semitic or not.

Jackson received 8 percent of the Jewish vote in the 1988 Democratic primaries.<sup>74</sup> According to the survey, however,

Jews were less likely to vote for Jackson than other whites, less likely than white Protestants, less likely than Catholics, and less likely than liberals, though Jews tend more than

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Milton Himmelfarb, "Jackson, The Jews, And The Democrats," National Review, November 7, 1988, p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



others to describe themselves as liberal.<sup>75</sup>

Jews who voted for Jackson tended to support the issues at the heart of his agenda. These issues included Jackson's stance on increased social spending, decreased defense spending, and sanctions against South Africa.<sup>76</sup>

According to a survey conducted by a Queens College sociologist, although Jews believed that blacks were more likely to be anti-Semitic than any other group, Jews tended to vote for them in much greater proportions than did other whites.<sup>77</sup> In one example the survey noted that in 1982 Tom Bradley, an African American received 75 percent of the Jewish vote in the Los Angeles mayoral contest.<sup>78</sup> Other cities had also registered significant Jewish support for black candidates. Therefore one could not assume that Jews stayed away from voting for Jesse Jackson simply because of his race.

According to Sol Stern in his article, "Jesse's Jews," Jackson blamed organized Jewish leadership for his low Jewish support. He believed that attacks on his character by members of the media hurt his chances with Jewish voters. Jackson also blamed Ed Koch for some of his problems.<sup>79</sup> Stern disagreed with the candidate's assessment of his relatively low levels of Jewish support.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Sol Stern, "Jesse's Jews," The New Republic, Issue 3, 831, June 20, 1988, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> "Jesse's Jews," Ibid, p. 19.



From all evidence it's not because Jesse is black, or that the Jews haven't been listening to him. They have listened carefully to the text of the redemption and reconciliation sermon, but they apparently continue to hear a disturbing subtext. It was in California at a Jackson fund-raiser last fall that the candidate chastised a young black lawyer for daring to ask him a question about the 1984 Farrakhan episode in a room full of Jews. "Let them speak for themselves," Jackson scolded.<sup>80</sup>

In his 1988 bid for the Presidency Jesse Jackson tried to reach out to Jewish voters in ways that he had not done in his unsuccessful 1984 bid. On many occasions he apologized for his 1984 indiscretions. Yet Jewish voters remained leary of this candidate who had once so closely aligned himself with Minister Louis Farrakhan. Many remained distrustful of Jesse's pleas that he was not an anti-Semite.

Throughout this campaign the media continued to scrutinize Jackson's words. Much of the secular media announced that the 1988 Jackson campaign had undergone a wholesale transformation since 1984. Although many Jewish publications agreed that Jackson seemed to have moderated his views since 1984, most felt that they could not endorse the candidate. These views of a more moderate Jackson in the Jewish media represented a fundamental change in thinking about the candidate since his 1984 presidential bid.

Jewish animosity toward Jackson remained high during the 1988

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 19.



primary season. In the public arena Jewish critiques of Jackson continued to strain black/ Jewish relations. Blacks were angered when many Jews refused to forgive Jackson for his 1984 mistakes. It seemed that for many Jewish voters Jesse Jackson could do nothing to earn their trust. This clearly offended African-American voters.

At the end of this unsuccessful campaign for the White House Jackson emerged as a strong advocate for peace among blacks and Jews. This role as peacemaker would continue into the next decade. Jesse Jackson wanted African-Americans and Jewish-Americans to come together.



## Chapter V

### A New Jackson: 1988 And Beyond

In the years since his unsuccessful 1988 presidential bid Jesse Jackson has continued the quest to improve his relationship with the American-Jewish community. He has addressed Jewish audiences. He has spoken out against anti-Semitism. He has sought to improve the sometimes strained relationship between members of the African-American community and members of the Jewish community. He has urged blacks and Jews to come together to discuss their differences. Members of the Jewish media that castigated Reverend Jackson during his 1979 trip to Israel have since reassessed Jackson and printed stories about the transformation of his attitudes towards Jews. Yet many American Jews still view Jesse Jackson with distaste. They remain skeptical of his words. They do not believe that Jackson has undergone any kind of transformation.

The noted author Anne Roiphe is not one of these people. In a 1990 article for Present Tense Roiphe asserts that Jesse Jackson is not an enemy of the American Jewish community. Jews have had real enemies in their long history as a people she argues, but the Rev. Jesse Jackson should not be considered one of them:

Is the Jewish attitude toward Jesse Jackson warranted and rational or is it mythological and self-destructive? What will we be burning when we burn Jesse Jackson on some stake that we have reserved for the enemies



of the Jews?<sup>1</sup>

In her article she analyzes some of the reasons that Jews fear and feel contempt for Jackson. She also seeks to understand Jewish suspicions of the man who is actively courting a positive Jewish relationship. At the end of her analysis the author concludes that most Jewish fears and suspicions about Jackson are unnecessary. She cites Jackson's "Hymie" remarks as one example. Roiphe concedes that to utter these words in a bid for the presidency is to alienate many voters. Yet she wonders whether some Jews are not acting too self-righteously when they remember this incident with such fervor. Many Jews who are quick to judge Jackson have used the word "shvartzer" to describe blacks in conversation. Roiphe argues that it might not have been politically correct for Jackson to refer to Jews as Hymies in private conversation, but it is not so serious an incident as to brand him as anti-Semitic forever.

If you say that it exposes an anti-Semitism that is deep and dreadful then you have to examine our own Jewish use of words: Are we really racists, bigots, violently opposed to Christians because we have called someone a shiksa or a goy?<sup>2</sup>

According to Roiphe it seems that many members of the American-Jewish community have been overly sensitive to Jackson's remarks. She implies that if Jews continually fail to forgive Jackson for his mistakes,

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Roiphe, "He's Not The Enemy," Present Tense, Vol. 17, No. 2, January /February 1990, p. 57.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 58.



then the consequences may be far greater than simply alienating themselves from Jesse Jackson. If Jews fail to make amends with Jackson then the Jewish community might further exacerbate tense black/Jewish relations?

Roiphe also addresses Jackson's support for a Palestinian State in the Middle East. This has caused a great fear of Jackson among many American Jews. Yet Jackson has publically stated on numerous occasions that he does not want to destroy or harm the State of Israel. The author explains that one need not be black or Jesse Jackson to feel the need for a solution to Arab and Jewish concerns for safety and independence in the region. Plenty of Israelis share Jackson's opinion on this issue. Yet according to Roiphe too many American Jews do not trust Jackson's motivations in the Middle East. They equate his wish for a Palestinian State with a way to harm Israel. She claims, "the odd thing is that when Jackson says he wants a secure Israel no one believes him. When Jackson says he is not anti-Zionist, many Jews assume he is lying,"<sup>3</sup> Roiphe observes that the only way that some American Jews would trust Jackson would be if he held a right-wing stance on the the Palestinian question. She labels this position a racist one.

According to Roiphe the greatest motivation for continued American suspicion of Jackson is his friendship with Louis Farrakhan. Many Jews are unable to forget that Jackson was slow to renounce Farrakhan's words,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



and when he did it was not in strong enough words for their satisfaction. But Roiphe argues that Jackson did deplore Farrakhan's statements. He spoke out against prejudice, anti-Semitism, and hatred. He might not have acted as quickly as the Jewish community would have liked on Farrakhan's words, but he did speak of justice for all people. Roiphe points out that,

the fact remains that Jackson did speak out, and he has said over and over again, in meetings with Jewish leaders, in the black press and in his public speeches, that the Jewish-African-American alliance is not dead, that we need each other to assure that America stays open to all, that the majorities respect their minorities. Why is it so hard to hear him? Why is it that when he says things friendly to Jewish interests we discount the words?<sup>4</sup>

Roiphe answers her own questions and suggests that many Jews continue to want to hear Louis Farrakhan when Jesse Jackson speaks and as a result they miss Jackson's words. Many Jews cannot separate Jackson from Farrakhan. The author writes that Farrakhan remains stuck to Jackson like his shadow. Roiphe questions the soundness of such a viewpoint:

Our deafness to Jesse Jackson is not in our own interest. For moral reasons we have to repair the schism between Jews and blacks because we are and have always been an ethical people with a liberation dream and we and our

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



children will not be comfortable simply securing our own economic salvation.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that Roiphe would like to see the American Jewish population forgive Jesse Jackson for his past mistakes. She believes that by so doing blacks and Jews might have a better chance to repair their fractured relations. She wonders why Jews remain hesitant about Jackson's pleas for black/Jewish unity.

By Roiphe's tone it seems that many American Jews are still not ready to forgive Jesse Jackson. Some might have already forgiven Jackson for his anti-Semitic utterings, but feel that they will never be able to trust him. Although he has apologized on numerous occasions for his insensitive remarks, and tries to work to bring about greater understanding between blacks and Jews, many Jews continue to harbor deep resentment against the man who once collaborated with Louis Farrakhan.

In a 1993 Jerusalem Report article Ze'ev Chafets also argues that Jesse Jackson need not be seen as the enemy of the Jewish people. He asserts that in recent years Jackson has changed. He has entered the mainstream of black leadership and Democratic politics. This piece was written by the author after Jackson's February 11, 1993 meeting with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in New York. At this meeting Peres officially invited Jackson to come to the Jewish State. Chafets believes that this invitation was long

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



overdue.<sup>6</sup>

Chafets recalls Jackson's 1979 trip to Israel when Prime Minister Menachem Begin refused to meet with the African-American leader. Begin was advised not to receive Jackson. According to the author, after this refusal to meet Jackson blacks felt that Israel was unfriendly to African Americans. This incident, along with the Andrew Young resignation which had took place only a month before, fueled their suspicions. Chafets believes that:

Begin failed to see the Young and Jackson affairs in their true, i.e. domestic, context....as a part of a nasty quarrel between the black and the Jewish establishments in the United States. September 1979 marks the time when that struggle first took on serious anti-Israel overtones.<sup>7</sup>

Chafets writes that Jackson exploited these feelings. He seemed to know just what to do to anger American Jews. He made friends with Arab leaders. He identified with the Palestinian cause. The author sees these actions as, "revenge against the Jewish establishment that opposed affirmative action; a declaration of independence from liberal Jewish tutelage."<sup>8</sup> Anti-Jewish sentiment again erupted during the 1984 Presidential campaign when Jackson was accused of referring to Jews as Hymies.

The author suggests that Jackson has made great efforts in recent years

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<sup>6</sup> Ze'ev Chafets, "Doing The Right Thing," The Jerusalem Report, March 11, 1993, p. 33

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



to turn his image around. He has spoken up on behalf of Syrian Jewry. He has altered his anti-Israel stance. He has tried to better understand Jewish sensitivities. Chafets does however acknowledge that what Jackson really feels in his heart about Jews is anybody's guess.

There are still some American Jews who despise Jackson and oppose his visit [to Israel] on the grounds that it will lend him credibility. But Jackson needn't be their enemy, and he certainly needn't be ours."<sup>9</sup>

Chafets, like Roiphe, believes that the American Jewish population should no longer fear Jesse Jackson. Both of these authors argue that Jackson has undergone a transformation. His opinions about Jews have changed. He no longer seeks to alienate Jews, but rather wishes that blacks and Jews could come together to work out their differences. It seems that Chafets perceives Jackson as a moderate, much the same way that the secular media described him during the 1988 Presidential campaign.

Other members of the Jewish media have also responded positively to Jackson's attempts to reach out to American Jewry. Periodicals have written feature stories about him. In January 1993, The Baltimore Jewish Times devoted their cover story to Jesse Jackson. The Cleveland Jewish News did the same thing a month later. Each of these publications have painted a picture of a Jackson transformation. They have reported that the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



man who once had few nice comments to make about Jews, now encourages dialogue between blacks and Jews. On many occasions since the 1988 Presidential election Jackson has spoken out against anti-Semitism and racism.

One of these instances occurred in August 1991. When black/Jewish tensions grew violent in Crown Heights, New York, Jesse Jackson encouraged dialogue between the two sides. Three nights of black rioting and overt anti-Semitic events were prompted by the death of a seven-year-old black child. Gavin Cato was struck by a car driven by an official of the central organization of the Lubavitch Chasidim.<sup>10</sup> During the uproar that followed the incident, Yankel Rosenbaum, a 29-year-old rabbinical student from Australia, was stabbed to death by a gang of black youth. The blacks were reported to have chanted, "get a Jew!"<sup>11</sup> In the ensuing tension and violence Jackson urged restraint. Tensions escalated again in Crown Heights in October 1992 when Yankel Rosenbaum's assailant was acquitted by a mostly black and Latino jury.<sup>12</sup> The Jewish community was stunned by the acquittal. Again Jesse Jackson tried to help ease community tensions:

[when conflicts arise] our leadership must turn to each other, not on each other, and work to heal those rifts, and not allow those incidents to fracture the basic

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<sup>10</sup> Jesse D. Besser, "Crown Heights And Beyond," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 208, No. 8, December 25, 1992, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



structural long-term interests of our relationship.<sup>13</sup>

Jackson's transformation into a moderate black leader was exemplified during the Crown Heights incident. Rather than fan the flames of hatred during an already tense situation, Jackson urged blacks and whites to come together. This reaction was very different from his reaction to the Andrew Young affair in 1979. Jackson seems to understand that members of the black community see him as a role model. He has the ability to influence popular opinion about many black/white and black/Jewish issues.

Jackson spoke out again on anti-Semitism on July 7, 1992 when he addressed the World Jewish Congress in Brussels, Belgium. He delivered a stirring message to the delegates to the Congress. He urged Jews and blacks to come together once again to make the world a better place to live:

Let us take this opportunity to advance the cause of healing, building, social justice, racial justice, gender equality, a healthy environment, and world peace. Let us reason together, and agree to agree or to disagree as equals without being disagreeable.....If we search for coalition, we will find it. If we choose polarization it will not require much effort.<sup>14</sup>

Many of these words that Jackson delivered to the World Jewish Congress were hauntingly familiar to words that Jackson used to address

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> Jesse Jackson, "My Brother's Keeper," World Jewish Congress, Brussels, Belgium, July 7, 1992.  
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the Democratic National Convention in 1984. In that speech Jackson also remarked that blacks and Jews can agree to disagree without causing rifts between the two groups. It seems that for almost eight years Jackson has been urging blacks and Jews to find a way to patch up their differences. For eight years Jackson has been using similar phrases to describe his desires for the African-American and Jewish-American communities.

In his speech Jackson advocated that members of the American-Jewish community, as well as members of the world Jewish community, should once again work together with blacks to solve the social problems that befell them. He proposed justice for all peoples of the world, an end to discrimination based on gender, a new commitment for world peace. Jackson explained that the struggle to overcome prejudice in the world was a struggle for all mankind. Blacks and Jews must work together in these efforts. He recalled with pride the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. He encouraged blacks and Jews to continue to build upon their legacy. Jackson also mentioned the work of Kivvie Kaplan as president and Roy Wilkins as executive director of the NAACP as a shining example of blacks and Jews working together to root out evil in society.

He told the story of how black American soldiers were the first to liberate Jews in the Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration Camps. Jackson explained that for some of these Jewish prisoners this was the first time



that they had seen a black man in their lives. Yet they came out running and embraced these black liberators. Jackson boasted that these African-Americans helped to bury the dead and to bring the sick to needed care. He referred to this moment as a “defining moment in our relationship.”<sup>15</sup> Jackson also recalled other times in American history when blacks and Jews stood side by side for a common goal. He mentioned that during the Persian Gulf War African-American soldiers were stationed in Israel and helped to protect the country from Scud missile attacks.<sup>16</sup>

Jackson explained that people must teach their children that racism and anti-Semitism were wrong. He recalled Pope John Paul II’s 1991 acknowledgement that anti-Semitism was a sin against God and humanity. He also admitted the part that Christianity had played over the centuries in fostering anti-Semitism. Jackson seemed to go out of his way to urge reconciliation between blacks and Jews. By admitting that Christianity had played a role in the long history of anti-Semitism Jackson further sought to reach out to Jews.

Jackson touted his own achievements during this address as well. He reminded the delegates that he went to speak to Gorbachev during the 1985 Geneva Summit.

I raised the issue to Gorbachev of the Jews who were still not permitted to leave his country. There were some at the time who criticized me for raising an inappropriate

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*



issue during a discussion of global peace and disarmament. It was a moment pregnant with possibility to put the, "am I my brother's keeper" ethical question on the table.....The repression of Soviet Jews was an act of violence as great as any bomb.<sup>17</sup>

Jackson reiterated his stance for a strong Israel as well as for an equitable solution to the Palestinian problem. He called the destinies of Israelis and Palestinians inextricably bound. He added that he looked forward to the day when the region would become one of peace and development for all its inhabitants and would cease to be a region of war and division.

As he closed his remarks Jackson challenged the World Jewish Congress to act together with the black citizens of the world to create a lasting peace. He suggested that together these groups could work to eradicate anti-Semitism. Blacks and Jews could bring justice and democracy to South Africa. He also encouraged blacks and Jews to share church and synagogue experiences so that each could have a greater appreciation of what the other group found holy. In his patented phrase, Jackson urged all of his audience to keep hope alive for a better tomorrow.<sup>18</sup>

It seems that Jackson's speech to the World Jewish Congress exemplifies his new desire to reach out to members of the Jewish community. His words carefully included references to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



Abraham Joshua Heschel, the two leaders who are so often equated with positive black/Jewish cooperation during the civil rights era. It is clear that this model for cooperation between blacks and Jews is what Jackson desires.

USA Today printed a story featuring Jackson two days after his address to the World Jewish Congress. The author of the story commented that in his speech Jackson had urged blacks and Jews to heal their past wounds. The article quoted NAACP Director Benjamin Hooks who said that the speech was a great gesture and that he expected it to pay great dividends. It also reported that a Jewish Congressman from New York, Representative David Ackerman, thought the speech was terrific. Other Jewish leaders were heartened by his words but remained skeptical. One said that Jackson must move beyond words and practice what he preached.<sup>19</sup>

A popular weekly black magazine also printed a story about Jackson's Brussels address. The publication suggested that the speech helped forge closer ties between blacks and Jews. The article highlighted Jackson's denial of the existence of anti-Semitism among black Americans. The magazine quoted Jackson as saying that violent, anti-Jewish lyrics in rap songs do not represent the mainstream of African-American opinion.<sup>20</sup>

On November 24, 1992 Jesse Jackson continued his campaign for

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Benedetto, "Jackson Makes Call For Unity," USA Today, July 9, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> "Jackson's Brussels Speech Helps Forge Closer Ties Between Blacks And Jews," Jet, Vol. 82, No. 14, July 27, 1992 p. 7.



healing between the African-American and Jewish-American communities when he spoke to the New York Board of Rabbis and African-American Citywide Clergy Council. In this address Jackson commended the efforts put forth by the members of the council to work together to create harmony between the two groups:

Given our history as co-partners in the struggle against racism, anti-Semitism, and fascism, we must never allow hope to be swallowed up by hurt.....Blacks and Jews are bound by the struggles against fascism, racism, and genocide, blood shared as we shared common graves. We are linked by the hope for the bright day of justice, and tempered by mercy. Our hopes must be stronger than our fears.....We must do better to strengthen our relationship, for the stakes are high. History shows that when we work together, there is no limit to what we can achieve. When we fail to do so, so goes the moral fabric of our nation.<sup>21</sup>

This address, like the one at the World Jewish Congress, focused on the importance of African-Americans and Jewish-Americans working together to achieve common goals. Jackson advocated looking beyond the hurt of recent events, particularly the Crown Heights tensions, to new chapters in the historic relationship between blacks and Jews. As in many of his speeches Jackson encouraged his audience to keep hope alive for a better tomorrow.

On December 14, 1992 Robert K. Lifton, President of the American

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<sup>21</sup> Jesse Jackson, "New York Board of Rabbis and African American Citywide Clergy Council Statement." New York City, November 24, 1992.



Jewish Congress, and Jesse Jackson, President of the National Rainbow Coalition formally announced a common legislative agenda between the African-American and the Jewish-American communities. In an American Jewish Congress Press Release the two leaders commented that they could not let short-term distractions and heated rhetoric overshadow the long-term interests of the communities. Lifton and Jackson described a whole range of issues that blacks and Jews would work on together. These included encouraging a more vigorous response to atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, supporting U.S. efforts to provide relief to the people of Somalia, and joining together to publicize the movie The Liberators, which detailed the experience of African-American soldiers in World War II who liberated the Dachau concentration camp.<sup>22</sup>

On that same day Jackson also issued a press release publicizing this documentary that featured the story of the African-Americans who liberated the Dachau Concentration Camp. Jackson viewed the movie as another vehicle to help restore goodwill between blacks and Jews. Jackson stated in his press release:

In World War II, African American soldiers liberated the camps at Dachau and Buchenwald. Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate, shares the story of the first time he ever saw an African American standing over him and weeping. Ralph Bunche won a Nobel Peace Prize for helping to establish the State of Israel. When this

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<sup>22</sup> "AJCongress, National Rainbow Coalition Launch "New Mobilization" on Common Legislative Agenda," AJCongress News Release, December 14, 1992.



marvelous coalition of blacks and Jews are together,  
we are liberators and nation builders. <sup>23</sup>

Three days later The Liberators: Fighting On Two Fronts premiered at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. Before the showing of the film Jesse Jackson addressed the audience. He explained that the movie told one of the great stories of shared suffering that bind the black and Jewish communities together. Jackson mentioned how ironic it was for these black soldiers who liberated the concentration camps. One day they were confronted by the horrors of anti-Semitism, and the next day when they returned home they had to face segregation.

Our destinies are bound up in common tears and  
common graves, not just yesterday, but today  
and tomorrow. Our children shall share this  
commonality as long as people's fears express  
themselves in violence and hatred against historic  
scapegoats. Today, lest we forget, racism and anti-  
Semitism still thrive.<sup>24</sup>

Jackson suggested that blacks and Jews must use their common histories to come together to solve the problems that faced them. He urged both groups to commit themselves to a common vision of a better tomorrow:

In honor of the Liberators and the survivors of the  
Holocaust, who teach us inspiration in the face of their  
strength, humility in the face of their pain, and wisdom

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<sup>23</sup> Jesse Jackson, "National Rainbow Coalition, Inc. Press Release," December 14, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Jesse Jackson, "Healing America," Harlem, New York, December 17, 1992.



in their sense of history, let us move forward. Let us turn pain into power and partnership, not pain and polarization. Let us choose hope and help over hurt and hate. Let us tear down walls and build bridges, and keep hope alive.<sup>25</sup>

A few weeks after Jackson's speech at the Apollo, and the premiere of the film that was going to be used as a tool for black/Jewish reconciliation, questions arose in the press as to the accuracy of the documentary.

According to The Jerusalem Report, the conservative magazine New York Guardian charged that the documentary's main claim was not true. Blacks never liberated Dachau or Buchenwald. Black veterans of the two units mentioned in the film asserted that they were sixty miles away from the camps when they were liberated.<sup>26</sup>

Cynics argued that the film was developed as a way to revive a black/Jewish partnership that had long since died. In her Tikkun article describing the controversy Letty Cottin Pogrebin argues that the producers of the documentary lost sight of the boundaries between fact and drama.

By playing tricks with the truth, the filmmakers compromised their own goals and destroyed what I believe was the film's greatest potential: to advance the radical notion of reciprocity in the historical relationship between blacks and Jews by showing blacks in the helping role that has been most typically been played by Jews.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Broder, "A Film Fails at Reconciliation," The Jerusalem Report, March 11, 1993, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "Truth or Consequences: The Liberators Controversy," Tikkun, Vol. 8, No. 3.



In the end many of the benefits for a renewed black/Jewish partnership that the film was supposed to engender lost their attractiveness. Many of Jackson's kind words for the black troops who liberated the concentration camps proved to be without merit. What the film did engender was a great deal of controversy.

The controversy surrounding this film did not detract from Jackson's attempts at coalition building between African-Americans and Jewish-Americans. He continued to address Jewish organizations and he granted interviews to Jewish publications. Yet not all of the publicity that Jackson received was positive. In a March 8, 1993 article in New Republic Martin Peretz wrote a scathing assessment of Jesse Jackson. He explains that Jackson came to Harvard University and preached harmony between blacks and Jews. But according to the author he was the one who had done more than anyone else to widen the gap between the two groups. Now Peretz asserts that Jackson thinks that he is the most qualified person to repair the damage.<sup>28</sup>

Peretz suggests that Jackson's "conversion" is due in large part to the Clinton Presidency.

Jackson's constituency is now much better represented by Marian Wright Edelman and Hillary Rodham Clinton. He is no longer central, which means he is desperate; and he's desperate particularly for the friendship of the Jews whose distrust made him a burden for the Democrats.

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Peretz, "Cambridge Diarist," The New Republic, March 3, 1993



Overestimating the power of the Jews, as anti-Semites are prone to do, Jackson thinks that, in forgiving his sins, they will re-establish his respectability.<sup>29</sup>

Yet for all of his attempts to try to create greater dialogue between African Americans and Jewish Americans, it seems that many blacks and Jews remain at odds with each other. Many Jews still feel that they cannot trust Jesse Jackson. A January 1993 Baltimore Jewish Times feature on Jesse Jackson reported that many Jews still remained skeptical of Jackson despite all of his efforts to bring blacks and Jews together. Abraham Foxman, executive director of the Anti-Defamation League comments that Jackson still engages in semantics. He explains that to this day he has never disowned Farrakhan; he has just used different verbiage. Yet Foxman does acknowledge all of Jackson's efforts to improve black/Jewish relations:

His difficulties with the Jewish community did not come from one statement, one speech. It was a pattern over the years. To make it whole, to heal it, it will take time. We should welcome his effort to heal. It is a slow process, but a welcome process.<sup>30</sup>

In a February 1993 Hadassah Magazine article Rabbi Alexander Schindler puts Jesse Jackson's latest behavior into perspective. Rabbi Schindler explains that Jackson has met with many segments of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> James D. Besser, "Has Jesse Changed?" Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 209, No. 5, January 29, 1993, pp. 51-52.



American Jewish community. He has spoken with a wide diversity of Jewish organizations and denounces anti-Semitism wherever he goes:

He is bending himself into a pretzel to please the Jewish community. His motives may or may not be pure, but many in the Jewish community say it doesn't matter, Jackson has apparently decided that being perceived as hostile to Jewish interests is not serving him or his community, so he is systematically trying to correct that perception.<sup>31</sup>

Jackson continued to speak out against anti-Semitism in January 1994, when he called the words of Khalid Abdul Muhammad, "racist, anti-Semitic, divisive, untrue and chilling."<sup>32</sup> Muhammad, a spokesman for the Nation of Islam, delivered a speech at Kean College in Union, New Jersey on November 29, 1993 that attacked Jews, homosexuals, and Catholics.<sup>33</sup> On January 16, 1994 the Anti-Defamation League reprinted large portions of the text in the New York Times. In one portion of the speech Muhammad asserts that Jews control much of American society, including news organizations, the Federal Reserve, the Presidency, and many black leaders.<sup>34</sup>

In his New York Times article, "Jackson Urges Farrakhan To Reply To Aide's 'Racist, Anti-Semitic' Speech," Alan Finder reports that Jesse

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<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "Understanding Misunderstanding," Hadassah, February 12, 1993, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Finder, Alan, "Jackson Urges Farrakhan To Reply To Aide's 'Racist, Anti-Semitic' Speech," New York Times, January 23, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid



Jackson called on political, educational and religious leaders to respond to the remarks and to use the occasion to bring blacks and Jews closer together. Jackson commented, "We have too much history and heritage of fighting together to stop now, so I would hope that leadership would be clear on the horror of this statement and use it to come together."<sup>35</sup>

Jackson called on Louis Farrakhan, the head of the Nation of Islam, to denounce the speech. At a February 3, 1994 news conference however, Louis Farrakhan, "refused to dismiss himself" from his aide's remarks.<sup>36</sup> At the news conference Farrakhan announced he was dismissing his aide, "not for the message but for the manner in which it had been delivered."<sup>37</sup> Farrakhan asserted, "while I stand by the truths that he spoke, I must condemn in the strongest terms the manner in which those truths were delivered."<sup>38</sup> According to Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, "Farrakhan's words were doubletalk, doublethink, acrobatics, and semantics. He did not reject the message, he did not reject the messenger, but he rejected the delivery."<sup>39</sup>

Foxman had kinder words for Jesse Jackson's remarks. "I welcome Rev. Jackson's strong, unequivocal denunciation of the anti-Semitism and his repudiation of the context and the messenger."<sup>40</sup> A New York Times

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Kalb, Deborah, "Farrakhan Fails To Denounce Anti-Semitic Remarks, The American Israelite, Vol. 140, No. 30, February 10, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. A 26.

<sup>40</sup> "Jackson Urges Farrakhan To Reply To Aide's 'Racist, Anti-Semitic' Speech," p. A15.



editorial praised Jackson's swift response.<sup>41</sup> The Baltimore Jewish Times and the Forward also reported that Jackson had wasted no time in condemning Muhammad's anti-Semitic remarks.<sup>42 43</sup>

It is clear that Jesse Jackson has gone out of his way to try to build better relations between blacks and Jews since his disastrous 1984 bid for the presidency. On numerous occasions he has urged African Americans and Jewish Americans to set aside their differences and to work toward achieving common goals. Jackson's speech to the World Jewish Congress exemplifies this desire to create better relations.

Many Jews remain skeptical of Jackson's motivations. Some argue that he is reaching out to Jews only to further his own political standings. Others are wary of trusting a man who once so closely aligned himself with the Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. Still others are concerned that the outward Jackson transformation is merely window dressing. They wonder if Jackson is not really an anti-Semite when he is away from the watchful eyes of the media. Many of these Jews will always find an excuse for why American Jewry should not trust Jesse Jackson.

Yet there are many Jews who have welcomed Jesse Jackson's transformation into a moderate black leader. When tensions erupt between African-Americans and Jewish-Americans Jackson is often called

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<sup>41</sup> "Confronting A Hate Speech," New York Times, January 26, 1994, p. A14

<sup>42</sup> Besser, James D., "Cardin Takes On Farrakhan," Baltimore Jewish Times, Vol. 215, No. 5, February 4, 1994, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> Kahn, Gabriel, "Hatefest # 2 Set For Islam Aide," Forward, Vol. 97, No. 30, 960, January 28, 1994, p. 5.



to help diffuse the situation. Jackson always urges cooperation between blacks and Jews. He looks forward to the day when African-Americans and Jewish-Americans will again work together for the betterment of mankind, as they did so productively during the civil rights era.

Whether or not American Jews approve of all of Jesse Jackson's political views, Jews must understand that many members of the African-American see Jackson as one of their most important leaders. He wields great respect in much of the black community. African-Americans listen to what Jesse Jackson has to say. His opinions are important to them. They respond to his messages.

American Jews can no longer afford to alienate themselves from this leader of the black community. He has the ability to greatly influence black/Jewish relations in the future. He has worked tirelessly over the past several years to improve black/Jewish relations in America. He speaks out against racism and anti-Semitism. He denounces the evil words of Louis Farrakhan, the man to whom he was once so strongly connected. Jesse Jackson has moderated his perceptions of the American-Jewish community over the past decade. It is time that American Jews reassess their perceptions of the Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson.



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