

Jews, African Americans, and Israel: The Ties That Bind

by

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HIGHLIGHTS

Edward Wilmot Byden (1832-1912) , Pan African founding father:

“[I have] the deepest possible interest in the current history of the Jews—especially in that marvelous movement called Zionism. The question, in some respects, is similar that that which at this moments agitates thousands of descendants of Africa in America, And as to the history of the African race—their enslavement, persecution, proscription, and sufferings—closely resembles that of the Jews, I have been led . . . by a fellow feeling to study the great question now uppermost in the minds of thousands, if not millions, of Jews.”

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), founder of the NAACP:

“The African movement must mean to us what the Zionist movement must mean to the Jews, the centralization of race effort and the recognition of a racial front. To help bear the burden of Africa does not mean any lessening of effort in our problems at home. . . . For any ebullition of effort and feeling that results in an amelioration of the lot of Africa tends to ameliorate the conditions of colored peoples throughout the world.”

Malcolm X (1925-1965):

“Pan Africanism will do for the people of African descent all over the world, the same that Zionism has done for Jews all over the world.”

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968):

“I see Israel, and never mind saying it, as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can almost be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security and that security must be a reality.”

Introduction

Among other ties that should bind, Jews and African Americans share the lesson that history has to be learned and relearned by new generations because, otherwise, the past's vital wisdom for shaping a better future will be lost. Whatever our political affiliations, we are fortunate to be alive at a time when the election of the first African American president has reenergized the faith in the promise of the Declaration of Independence of a rich mosaic of people.

Though most Americans like to imagine our country is “a promised land,” the Hebrew Bible's narratives of redemption from slavery and oppression have provided a special spiritual roadmap for two communities: African Americans and Jews who have struggled—often as allies—for civil rights and inclusion in the American Dream. Most of us have heard of how Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a refugee from Hitler, walked arm-in-arm on the Selma Freedom March. Yet few people are taught about the historic positive bonds, going back into the nineteenth century, between Jews who pioneered the Zionist movement's aspirations for a Jewish state in the Holy Land and both African Americans and Africans looking for relevant strategies to further their own quests for redemption.¹

Despite the tensions in Black-Jewish relations over the four decades since the assassination of Reverend King, we can still learn valuable lessons from this story of “Zionism in Black and White.” The challenge for those of who believe that intergroup relations are not “a zero sum” game is to find ways in which African Americans and Jews can once again contribute to each other, our country, and the world in ways that recapture the positive dynamic of Black-Jewish relations for the twenty-first century.

What's “Zionism”—and Why It Matters

“Zionism”—the name for the modern movement among Jewish people to reestablish a national homeland in the Holy Land—has become a controversial term since the United Nations General Assembly in 1975 passed a resolution (subsequently repealed in 1991) equating “Zionism and racism.” In fact, there was racism at work at the UN in 1975, but it was to be found—not among Israel's “Zionist” supporters—but among the hostile forces seeking to demonize the Jewish state whose creation the UN itself had voted for back in 1947-1948. Unfortunately, “Anti-Zionism” today is not an ideology articulating the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians for their own state, living side by side with Israel; instead, it's an extremist movement that denies the reality of the Jewish people's historic connection to the Holy Land—just as other Deniers refuse to acknowledge the reality of the Holocaust.²

In his Cairo Speech reaching out to the Arab and Muslim world, President Barack Obama courageously challenged his audience to repudiate Holocaust Denial. What the region and the world still needs is a second speech—delivered in Israel—challenging the Palestinians and other Arabs and Muslims to accept Israel’s historic roots as well as right to exist in peace.³

Jews and other friends of Israel have a right to be proud of the Zionist movement’s accomplishment in creating out of the ashes of the Holocaust the first among the over 100 new nations that achieved independence by throwing off colonial rule after World War II. From the late 1800s, there were political, religious, and cultural varieties of Zionism—but never a racist variety because Zionism has always been a movement transcending race.⁴

This truth should matter especially not only to Jews—but to African Americans as well as Africans interested in their own history of fighting against racism and for freedom. The reason—as readers of this Report will discover—is that the Zionist movement for over a century served as a template for developing liberation strategies relied on by the peoples of the “African Diaspora” in both the new world and the old.

Pan Africanism and “That Marvelous Movement Called Zionism”

Soon after the publication of Theodore Herzl’s pathbreaking *Der Judenstaat* (1896), leaders of another people—dispersed like the Jews—began reacting to the Zionist project to found a new state. The year was 1898 and the leader was Edward Wilmot Blyden, the founding father of the modern Pan-African movement subsequently led by W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Cheikh Anta Diop, George Padmore, and Kwame Nkrumah. Born into a free black family on Charlotte-Amalie, capitol of St. Thomas, Danish Virgin Islands, Blyden was proud of his African ancestry yet also prized his close cultural ties with Jews, beginning with members of Amalie’s 400-strong Jewish community which produced such expatriate luminaries as Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro. He played on Synagogue Hill, watched the Yom Kippur services from outside the congregation, and struck up a youthful friendship with David Cardoze, Later as a rabbi, Cardoze taught Blyden the rudiments of Hebrew which he subsequently mastered.⁵

Blyden suffered rejection because of his race when he journeyed to the United States in 1850 seeking a theological education. The American Colonization Society then sent him as an agent to Liberia, the American “Black to Africa” experiment that in 1847 became an independent nation. Devoting the rest of life to Africa as an educator, publicist, and diplomat, Blyden traveled widely including an 1866 trip to Jerusalem about which he wrote in *From West Africa to Palestine* (1873). Blyden did not visit early Alliance Israelite Universelle projects, but nevertheless predicted that “Jews are to be restored to the land of their fathers” once “the misrule of the Turks” was overcome.⁶

Blyden yearned for the emergence among African Americans of “a Negro of Negroes, like Moses was a Hebrew of the Hebrews—even if brought up in Pharaoh’s house,” who would mobilize the selective return of new world Blacks to help regenerate Africa. This is why he was

fascinated by Herzl's meteoric rise as Zionism's "new Moses." He expressed his admiration for Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* and the First and Second Zionist Congress, held in 1897 and 1898, in a pamphlet, *The Jewish Question* (1898), whose publication was underwritten by Blyden's Jewish friend, Liverpool merchant and African trader Louis Solomon.⁷

Blyden begins by announcing his "deepest possible interest in the current history of the Jews—especially in that marvelous movement called Zionism." He then asserts that "the [Jewish] question, in some respects, is similar to that which at this moments agitates thousands of descendants of Africa in America, anxious to return to the land of their fathers," as well as to "the history of the African race—their enslavement, persecution, proscription, and sufferings—[which] closely resembles that of the Jews."⁸

Blyden, who sympathized with both Muslim and Christian missionary efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa, was euphoric about Zionist prospects in Palestine: "There is hardly a man in the civilized world—Christian, Mohammedan, or Jew—who does not recognize the claim and right of the Jew to the Holy Land." Blyden went even further by challenging "the great Zionist movement" to become involved in the "Dark Continent":

There is not, to my knowledge, a single synagogue in West Africa along three thousand miles of coast, and probably not two dozen representatives of God's chosen people in that whole extent of country—not a Jewish institution of any kind—either for commercial, religious or educational purposes. Have the Jews no witness to bear in inter-tropical Africa? . . . If the world owes an immense debt to the Jews, the Jews as well as the rest of mankind owe an immense debt to Africa; for it was upon that soil that a few nomads from Western Asia settled down, and, in the furnace of affliction, as well as in the house of preservation, grew to be a nation. . . . Now, Africa appeals to the Jew . . . to come with his scientific and other culture, gathered by his exile in many lands, and with his special spiritual endowments, to the assistance of Africa.⁹

Remarkably, and apparently without any knowledge of Blyden, Herzl in his 1902 novel, *Altneuland*, has Zionist Professor Steineck remark: "Now, that I have lived to see the return of the Jews, I wish I could help to prepare the return of the Negroes. . . . All men should have a homeland. Then they will be kinder towards each other. They will understand each other better and love their brethren better." The next year, the Zionist movement split over the British offer of an "autonomous settlement" in Uganda as a substitute for the Holy Land.¹⁰

Blyden's writings on Zionism reflect some of the same tension points—between “Palestine-centered” vs. “territorialist” Zionists and between a strategy emphasizing political action vs. cultural renewal—that shaped Herzl's movement.¹¹

W. E. B. Du Bois vs. Marcus Garvey on “Black Zionism”

Herzl died of a heart attack at age 44 in 1910. Blyden died at age 80 in 1912. The stage was set for the emergence of new leaders. World War I marked a shift in Zionist leadership from the UK to the U.S., personified by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis. The “Pan African Movement” advocating freedom from colonialism for Africa increasing turned to the leadership of multitalented African American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois, who already had won fame as the godfather of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909.¹²

Before and during World War I, Du Bois outgrew the fashionable anti-Semitism he acquired at Harvard and German universities, and came to admire American Jewish leaders like Joel and Arthur Spingarn and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise he worked with in the early civil rights movement. Du Bois studied the Zionist movement carefully, especially after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. In Paris to organize the Pan African Congress of 1919, he declared that: “The African movement must mean to us what the Zionist movement must mean to the Jews, the centralization of race effort and the recognition of a racial front. To help bear the burden of Africa does not mean any lessening of effort in our problems at home. . . . For any ebullition of effort and feeling that results in an amelioration of the lot of Africa tends to ameliorate the conditions of colored peoples throughout the world.” In 1921, Du Bois commented favorably on the completion of blueprints for a Hebrew University on the Mount of Olives “in the new Palestine.” In 1929, he blamed “the murder of Jews in Palestine” by “ruthless and bloodthirsty evil-doers” primarily on British maladministration. As late as 1940, he defended Zionist community building in Palestine: “If this is a failure, God send us Negroes some of the same article.”¹³

Back in the 1920s, Du Bois' Pan-African vision, which attracted elite intellectuals, was challenged by Marcus J. Garvey's mass-based “Back to Africa” movement. Born in Jamaica in 1887, Garvey arrived in the U.S. in 1916 in hopes that his Black Nationalist organization, the

Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), could implement Booker T. Washington's gospel of racial self-help on a global scale. In 1918, when Garvey launched his newspaper, *The Negro World*, he cabled British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour to do for Africans what the Balfour Declaration promised to do for Jews. In 1919, he founded the Black Star shipping line to further his remigration plans. In 1920, he electrified Harlem with a March of 25,000 to Madison Square Garden, and endowed the UNIA, whose membership ultimately reached 300,000, with titles of nobility, patriotic rituals, and a paramilitary Universal African Legion. The Legion may have been modeled on Vladimir Jabotinsky's World War I Jewish Legion which had fought during World War I on the side of the British.¹⁴

From the first, Garvey's movement, though it also compared itself to anti-British struggles in Ireland and Egypt, was permeated by analogies with Zionism. A South African supporter wrote in 1921, "Africans have the same confidence in Marcus Garvey that the Israelites had in Moses." In 1924, a Dahomean speaking at a UNIA Convention in New York affirmed that Garveyism was: "The Zionism of the Black Race." Declaring that the UNIA was "in sympathy with the Zionist movement," Garvey himself said in 1920: "a new spirit, a new courage, came to us at the same time it came to the Jew. When a Jew says, 'We shall have Palestine', the same feeling comes to us when we say 'we shall have Africa'." He never wavered from his faith that: "Africa remains the heritage of Black people, as Palestine is of the Jews." Among the Jews who reciprocated was Louis Michael of Los Angeles, who telegraphed Garvey in 1920: "As a Jew, a Zionist, and a Socialist, I join heartily and unflinchingly in your historical movement for the reclamation of Africa."¹⁵

Initially, Garvey shared the philo-Semitism of Du Bois who in 1916 had written: "If the Negroes of the United States want to know what organization is . . . they should buy the American Jewish Year Book." Yet Garvey's friendly if naïve attitude (he believed that Jews had miraculous powers to control great events like World War I) changed abruptly during and after his trial and conviction in 1923 for mail fraud. He bitterly complained about being "punished for the crime of [Black Star agent] Silverstone and persecuted by [federal prosecutor] Maxwell Mattuck, another Jew, and . . . sentenced by Judge Julian Mack, the NAACP board member." President of the Zionist Organization of America from 1918 to 1921, Judge Mack was not on the NAACP's national board, but was a member of the Chicago chapter and did contribute to the organization. His refusal to recuse himself from presiding over the trial convinced Garvey and his wife, Amy Jacques-Garvey, that "the Black Moses" had been the victim of "an international frameup" orchestrated by the NAACP and the Jewish prosecutor and judge and their fellow Jews on the jury. Garvey did indeed have enemies—whom he enraged by traveling to Atlanta in 1922 to seek the support of white supremacist KKK Imperial Wizard Edward Young Clarke—though there was no "Jewish conspiracy" behind his mail fraud conviction and deportation from the U.S. in 1927.¹⁶

Forced to live his remaining years in Jamaica and then London, where he died in 1940, Garvey became, in the words of African American journalist Roi Ottley, "the first Negro leader to raise

the ‘Jewish question’ in Negro life.” Originally pro-Garvey Yiddish papers like the *Morgen Journal* and *Tageblatt* recoiled from him after Garvey called Hitler “a great man” and announced that “Hitler’s ways could make the Negro the man he ought to be.” Yet after 1935, as Nazi persecution of the Jews became increasingly manifest, Garvey backtracked by expressing sympathy for Hitler’s Jewish victims and again praising their efforts to build a homeland in Palestine.¹⁷

The first major era between the World Wars during which Jews and Africans worked in parallel to build their own “Zionist movement” ended in mixed results: it solidified the alliance between Jews and W. E. B. DuBois and the NAACP; but it produced an estrangement between Jews and Marcus J. Garvey’s “Black Zionism.”

The Ethiopian Mystique and Black Judaism

One reason for the overwhelming support by African Americans for the creation of Israel in 1948 was a widespread positive identification with Jews that dated back to pre-Civil War Southern plantations, where slaves likened themselves to the Exodus of the biblical Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, and continued in the post-World War I Northern ghettos like Harlem, where thousands of African Americans cited the biblical verse that “Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God” (Psalms 68:31) to justify their joining religious sects claiming that “Blacks are the true Jews.”¹⁸

There have been Jews of many different skin colors—Jews by descent or conversion—probably since “the mixed multitude” leaving Egypt with Moses. Ethiopia’s Falashas or Beta Israel, who believe that they are descendents of the marriage between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, lived in the Horn of Africa in isolation from other Jews for many hundreds of years. In 1971 when Ethiopia was still ruled by Emperor Hailie Selassie, they were accepted as part of Judaism’s family under the ruling by Israel’s Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yossef that they are “descendants of Jewish tribes that moved South to Cush [Ethiopia]”—a ruling that became the basis of their incorporation under Israel’s Law of Return in 1975.¹⁹

Ethiopia’s Beta Israel, who now live in Israel, are often called “Black Jews.” Yet their Judaism differs in origins from the “Black Jewish” sects that emerged early in the twentieth century primarily in the U.S. After World War I, Black Christians, usually belonged to Holiness or Pentecostal sects, sought to “purify” their religion by adopting Jewish rites and rituals; they also sometimes claimed that people of African ancestry are the only true descendants of the biblical Jews. In addition to the U.S., such “Judaizing sects” appeared in a scattered arc of locations from the Caribbean to Africa to New Zealand. Not all “Judaizing sects” were made up of nonwhites. In the nineteenth century, white English Protestants joined the “Anglo Israelite” movement which claimed that Judaism’s Lost Tribes had settled the British Isles. Their same ideology asserting that white people from the UK are “true Jews” was later perverted into a white supremacist by Christian Identity churches in the U.S.²⁰

The first wave of American “Black Jewish” churches, founded around 1900, were typically “Hebrew Christian” in that they retained belief in Christ while introducing the Saturday Sabbath, Passover celebration, and the new doctrine that God and Jesus were black—as were the Patriarchs, Moses, Solomon, and the Queen of Sheba. The Church of the Living God, Pillar of Truth for All Nations, and the Church of God and Saints of Christ were founded, respectively, by F. S. Cherry, a seaman and railroad worker, and William S. Crowdy, a cook for the Santa Fe Railroad. Both were born as slaves and brought up as Southern Baptists.²¹

Crowdy’s itinerant ministry through the Midwest and Northeast led him to preach Black Judaism in the streets of Harlem in 1899. In 1903, he ordained a young South African who carried his gospel back to Pretoria. In 1921, Enoch Mgijima, a former follower of Crowdy’s, was at the center of “the Bulhoek Tragedy” in which South African authorities killed 163 Black Israelites and wounded and jailed hundreds more. Cherry’s church, headquartered in Philadelphia, spread to Chicago where it strongly supported the Garvey movement in the 1920s. He preached that black people were “chased out of Palestine by the Romans into the west coast of Africa,” and from there they were “captured and sold” as slaves to America. They were destined to return to the Holy Land.²²

During and after World War I, a second wave of Black-Jewish congregations emerged in Northern cities. Calling themselves Israelites, Hebrews, Canaanites, Essenes, Judaites, Rechabites, Falashas, or Abyssinians (Ethiopians), there were founded primarily by West Indian immigrants. Influenced by close contact with the Ashkenazic Jewish communities, their ministers often learned some Yiddish and Hebrew, and abandoned the Christological trappings of the earlier congregations. They still claimed a hereditary link to the biblical Israelites, but were more open to positive relations with “white” Jews.²³

The key figure in the 1920s was Rabbi Arnold Josiah Ford. The son of an Evangelical minister in Barbados, Ford came to Harlem in 1911 and at first pursued a career as a musician. Joining the Garvey movement, Ford associated with the Moorish Zionist movement led by a fellow Garveyite Mordecai Herman. As Garvey’s musical director, Ford composed “Ethiopia, Thou Land of our Fathers,” the Garveyite “national anthem” which New York’s Yiddish papers called “the Negro Hatikvah.” As many as 600 Black Jews marched in Garveyite Parades in Manhattan. But Garvey, who founded his own African Orthodox Church mirroring his Catholic upbringing, rebuffed Ford’s repeated efforts to convert him to Black Judaism. With the help of white Jewish benefactors, Ford founded his own congregation, Beth B’Nai Abraham, an offshoot of the Moorish Zionist Temple.²⁴

By this time, “Ethiopianism” was becoming an ideological connector in Black Jews’ attempts to build bridges to the white Jewish community including Zionists. In the nineteenth century, Psalms 68:31—“Princes shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God”—became a popular verse with free black preachers attempting to instill racial pride in their congregations. Then, Ethiopia took on political as well as theological salience with African

Americans because of a series of developments: the unexpected victory of the Ethiopians over the Italians at the Battle of Adawa in 1896, the signing of a U.S.-Ethiopian trade treaty in 1901, the visit to the U.S. of an Ethiopian delegation seeking renewal of the treaty in 1919, and the coronation of Emperor Hailie Selassie in 1930. Also significant was that Selassie spent part of his exile during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in the 1930s in the British Palestine Mandate.²⁵

Arnold J. Ford, who met with a member of the Ethiopian trade mission around 1919, was greatly affected when he also learned of the existence of Ethiopia's "Black Jews" from Jacques Faitlovich. A Polish-born Jew and Zionist, Faitlovich devoted his life to the cause of the Falashas or Beta Israel, establishing the American Pro-Falasha Committee in 1922 and bringing Emmanuel Taamrat, the first Ethiopian Jew to come to the New York, to study in the U.S. around 1931. In the 1920s, American Jews debated whether the Falashas or Beta Israel should be accepted as "Jewish." Faitlovich influenced these debates among "white Jews." In Harlem, however, nobody doubted the authenticity of Ethiopia's "Black Jews."²⁶

In Arnold Ford's mind, all Ethiopians ultimately derived from the marriage between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Ford viewed white Zionists' "Back to Palestine" movement and his own "Back to Ethiopia" movement as complementary "Zionist" enterprises. Ford may have been the first Black-Jewish leader to urge the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine to be shared by whites and blacks. He supported the Palestine Foundation Fund, showed Holy Land movies to his congregation, and promoted Jewish-Arab reconciliation efforts. In 1930 after a friendly meeting with Faitlovich (who visited Harlem in order to investigate the origins of its "Black Jewish" congregations), Ford accepted an invitation to attend the coronation of Emperor Hailie Selassie. He then decided to move his Harlem congregation to Addis Ababa. There, Ford established a school, but never got around to visiting the isolated Falasha or Beta Israel villages in the Ethiopian countryside. He died in 1935 just before the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Among the handful of African American followers who accompanied Ford to Ethiopia was Eudora Paris. While in Addis Ababa, Paris adopted an Ethiopian Coptic Christian child, known as Hailu Moshe Paris, whom she converted to Ford's faith of Black Judaism. The young man accompanied his mother back to New York in 1936. Graduating from Yeshiva University, Hailu Moshe Paris later spent time in Israel as well as Ethiopia where he worked with Falashas or Beta Israel before returning to the U.S. In New York in the 1970s, he became leader of the Black-Jewish Mt. Horeb Congregation in the Bronx.²⁷

After Arnold Ford moved to Ethiopia and died, he was succeeded back in Harlem by Rabbi Wentworth Arthur Matthew. Like Ford born in the West Indies, Matthew's headed the Commandment Keepers of the Royal Order of Ethiopian Hebrews, with several hundred black and six white congregants, that became one of the most enduring and influential Black Jewish congregations in New York. Matthew also established the Ethiopian Hebrew Rabbinical College (later known as the Israelite Rabbinical Academy) that trained dozens of Black Jewish rabbis. Among the graduates was Rabbi Capers Funnye of Chicago's Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken

Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation. Subsequently, Rabbi Funnye was formally converted to Judaism under both Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. In 1995, he formed the high-profile Alliance of Black Jews.²⁸

To take this story back to the 1940s: Rabbi Matthew maintained cordial relations with Jacques Faitlovich, who then moved from New York to Tel Aviv. Before 1948, Faitlovich continued to promote Jewish and Zionist outreach across ethnic and racial lines through the Lost Tribes Committee that was subsequently supported by Israeli President Yitzhak ben Zvi. The Lost Tribes Committee and the missionary Mosaic Law for One People, formed in New York in 1944 by David Horowitz, both advocated the mass conversion of African Americans to Judaism. No such mass conversion materialized, but efforts by white and black Zionists to promote Black-Jewish rapprochement did foster sympathy among African Americans for the momentous events in the Middle East that unfolded after World War II.²⁹

Israel's Birth Pangs in Black-Jewish Perspective

There was a relatively seamless transition between African Americans who protested the Holocaust while it was occurring and those who supported the creation of a Jewish state after World War II. This was true for W. E. B. Du Bois who in 1945 lamented that, because of “the supertragedy” of the Holocaust, “the plight of the Jews . . . has been even harder and more desperate than anything that Negroes have passed through in modern times.” Together with Du Bois, Paul Robeson, anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, poet Langston Hughes, actor Canada Lee, and labor leader A. Philip Randolph supported the wartime emergency rescue efforts of the controversial Bergson Group, and then transitioned to supporting Ben Hecht’s pro-Zionist play, “A Flag is Born,” staged by the Bergson Group in the autumn of 1946 and spring of 1947.³⁰

Pretty much the only complaint in the black press regarding lobbying for a Jewish state was that it had not been more successful. Following the founding session of the UN in San Francisco in April, 1945, the *Chicago Defender* editorialized, “the Jews, who hoped to get some consideration at San Francisco because of atrocities against Jews, are out of luck” because the world cared more about Hitler’s non-Jewish victims. W. E. B. Du Bois was singularly unsympathetic with the Arabs because of Saudi Arabia’s unrepentant continuation of the slave trade, as well as their “widespread ignorance and poverty and disease and a fanatic belief in the Mohammedan religion”—in contrast to Palestine’s “young and forward thing Jews, bringing a new civilization to an old land.”³¹

One critical counterpoint of this period was between activist W. E. B. Du Bois and diplomat Ralph Bunche. Though always insisting that the obligation of “the Negro people to support the fight for a free Israel” was inextricably linked with the obligation of the Jewish people “to support the fight for a free Africa,” Du Bois was vociferous in his advocacy of the UN Partition Resolution, passed in November, 1947, to authorize creation of a Jewish state. Israel’s Independence Declaration in May, 1948, was followed four months later by the appointment of

African American Ralph Bunche, previously secretary of the Palestine Peacekeeping Commission, to succeed assassinated Count Folke Bernadette. Fiercely pro-Zionist, Du Bois concentrated his fire not on the Stern Gang who assassinated Bernadette, but on the Truman Administration and “the apparent apostasy” of Bunche—“the grandson of slaves”—for not being pro-Zionist.³²

Bunche tried to walk a diplomatic fine line. Long an advocate of Black-Jewish cooperation to prevent the emergence of “an American Hitler,” he was ambivalent about Zionism. This is revealed by his troubled reaction to the “vibrant and virulent” Jewish nationalism he encountered Europe’s DP camps. A liberal integrationist, Bunche’s attitude was similar to NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White who did not approve “Jews who had made it [Zionism] a sacred cult.” Yet White, like Du Bois, had supported the Partition Resolution—successfully lobbying Haiti and Liberia in its behalf—“because Palestine seemed the only haven in the world for nearly one million . . . pathetically homeless Jews of Europe who look towards Palestine with the same hope that a devout churchman holds toward heaven.” David Horowitz, a strong lobbyist for good Black-Jewish relations, joined Moshe Shertok of the Jewish Agency in successfully lobbying Ethiopia to abstain on the UN Partition vote rather than voting against it as the Arabs wished.³³

At its thirty-ninth annual convention in Kansas City in June, 1948, the NAACP passed a resolution lauding: “The valiant struggle of the people of Israel for independence [that] serves as an inspiration to all persecuted people throughout the world. We hail the establishment of the new State of Israel and welcome it in the family of nations.”³⁴

Despite Du Bois’ criticism of him, Ralph Bunche proved an effective mediator, winning over Egypt’s King Farouk and Israel to the armistice agreement signed in February, 1949. During this period, Bunche met clandestinely Irgun chief, Menachem Begin, then still in hiding, who recalled in his memoir Bunche saying: “I can understand you. I am also a member of a persecuted minority.” Begin considered Bunche “a brilliant mind,” and—following Bunche’s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950—Israel’s President Chaim Weizmann honored him in a letter to an NAACP tribute dinner.³⁵

Another key figure was the multifaceted artist Paul Robeson—who declared he would sing for Israeli soldiers, should they need to fight, the same way he had for the antifascist forces in Spain. As did many other African American artists, famed singer Marian Anderson soon embraced Israel, declaring that “no audience was more remarkable than those we had when we performed at two kibbutzim, those pioneering agricultural communities that caused the desert to bloom.”³⁶

In contrast, African American critics of the new Jewish state were few and isolated. In 1947, *Pittsburgh Courier* columnist George Schuyler—an iconoclastic conservative who considered himself “the black H. L. Mencken”—had excoriated Bunche for being a Jewish pawn who was “likely to increase [the] hostility of the colored people of the East for American Negroes.” Agreeing with the like-minded African American writer George J. A. Rogers, Schuyler described

the Hebrew Bible as “the Jewish *Mein Kampf*” and Zionism as reactionary “hogwash . . . steeped in a religious and racial exclusiveness . . . not unreminiscent of the barbarous days to the so-called Mosaic period.” Schuyler was rebuked in a long editorial by his own newspaper.³⁷

The then still little-known Nation of Islam (NOI) was also critical of the creation of Israel. Black Muslim leader Elijah Muhammad had only recently been released for his jail sentence for draft evasion during World War II, and Malcolm X—in jail for burglary—had not yet completed his conversion to the Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam emerged from a messianic, racially nationalist milieu. The shadowy figure, Wallace D. Fard, who appointed Elijah Muhammad his prophet in the 1930s identified himself as an Arab from Mecca and taught NOI true believers that all black people were descendants of “the Lost-Found Tribe of Shabazz” that ruled the world from Egypt and Mecca before the evil scientist Yakub (Jacob) created the demonic white race including “the so-called Johnny-come-lately Jews.”³⁸

The ingredients for Elijah Muhammad’s—and Malcolm X’s—later incendiary critiques of Israel were already present. Muhammad was “livid” that Bunche had been involved in creating a homeland for Jews who were not “real” Jews while Bunche’s own people remained stateless. But at the time, the NOI was a low-profile organization, while Elijah Muhammad on occasion even complemented Jews—at least the Orthodox who kept kosher—as “better” than other whites.³⁹

In fact, pro-Zionist Black Jews were more influential on the African American religious scene than anti-Zionist Black Muslims until the late 1950s. The Black Jews wanted their own piece of the Zionist “action.” Rabbi Sar Abel Respes of Philadelphia’s Colored House of Moses wrote President Eisenhower asking for support in establishing a Black Jewish colony in Israel. Later, Respes’ group became the only Black-Jewish congregation to undergo ritual conversion en masse to Judaism. New York’s Rabbi Wentworth Arthur Matthew also made an effort to found a Black-Jewish community in Israel “in the name of the Falasha Hebrews in the Western Hemisphere.”⁴⁰

The Bandung Conference and Suez Crisis

Israel’s reputation among both Africans and African Americans remained predominately good until a countertrend developed at the time of the Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in 1955 and the Suez Crisis and Arab-Israeli War of 1956. Following Great Britain’s granting Ghana independence in 1957, the Jewish state quickly emphasized establishing good diplomatic and trade relations with the over 30 Sub-Saharan African states that emerged during the next two decades. By the early 1970s, 10 African states had embassies in Jerusalem, and Israel maintained relations with 32. Israel had established diplomatic relations with South Africa in 1948, maintaining a Legation from 1952. Yet after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, Israel vociferously criticized South Africa’s apartheid regime, resulting in a temporary rupture of relations. An Israeli embassy was not opened in Pretoria until 1974.⁴¹

Positive relations between Israel and the newly independent Sub-Saharan African nations tended to reinforce favorable African American attitudes toward the Jewish state. The young Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1956 commented: “There is something in the very nature of the universe which is on the side of Israel in its struggle with every Egypt.” In 1959, King made his only trip to the Middle East. Barred by Jordan from visiting the Old City, he was indelibly affected by Jerusalem. The last speech before his assassination in 1968 recalled his trip on the Jericho Road when Jericho was still in Arab hands.⁴²

The first significant setback came in 1955 when India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia convened the Afro-Asian or so-called Bandung Conference. The U.S. and U.S.S.R. were excluded by the members of what became known as the Non-Aligned Movement—but so was Israel at the insistence of Arab and Muslim states that successfully sponsored an anti-Israel resolution. By this time the Russians had abandoned their earlier support for Israel and signed a military assistance pact with Egypt’s Nasser. The next year, he nationalized the Suez Canal and stepped up military raids against Israel from Sinai. The result was the retaliatory war by Britain, France, and Israel which Egypt lost militarily but then won diplomatically after the U.S.S.R. and the Eisenhower Administration both used pressure on Nasser’s behalf.⁴³

The Suez Campaign was not popular in the African-American newspapers. Yet most papers concentrated their fire on British and French “imperialism.” The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* extenuated the actions of Israel—“this little democracy—the only one in the Middle East.” The *Baltimore Afro-American* mildly criticized Israel, not for blatant aggression, but for “bare aggression.” The *Pittsburgh Courier* pointed out that “many persons of integrity” questioned “the wisdom of Israel’s attack (or counterattack) on Egypt.” One of these “persons of wisdom” was W. E. B. Du Bois who—breaking with four decades of staunch support for Zionism—followed the Soviet policy line in a poem, *Suez*, which lamented Israelis becoming “the shock troops of the two knaves/Who steal the dark man’s land.” Still, the only vituperative condemnations of Israel for “unabashed aggression” came from the two columnists with no particular following—George Schuyler and J. A. Rogers—who had opposed Israel’s creation in 1947-1948.⁴⁴

Even so, Nasser emerged from the 1956 War as something a hero among American Africans for “standing up” to British and French imperialism. Elijah Muhammad’s the Nation of Islam was especially favorable toward Nasser’s Egypt. In 1957, an African American magazine, perhaps on the basis of an FBI leak, reported the NOI was already receiving financial support from the Middle East. In January, 1958, in anticipation of another Afro-Asian conclave scheduled for Cairo, Elijah Muhammad cabled Nasser his prayers for a successful meeting from “your long lost Muslim Brothers in America.” Nasser responded cordially. In February, 1958, Muhammad told his followers that “Jesus was not a Jew”—meaning a white Jew or “the seed of the devil”—because only black Jews were born in Palestine. In April, 1958, the Black Muslims hosted their own conference in Los Angeles, on the eve of Israel’s tenth anniversary, featuring Arab dignitaries including propagandist Mohammed Mehdi who ruled out peace with Israel.⁴⁵

The next year, Elijah Muhammad sent Malcolm X to lay the groundwork for his own pilgrimage in 1959 to Egypt and Mecca. Malcolm was quite blunt in urging the Arabs “to reach the millions of colored people in America who are related to the Arabs by blood” who “would be completely in sympathy with the Arab cause.” Officially invited by Nasser, Elijah Muhammad met with the Egyptian President in late 1959, convincing him that the NOI was an ideal instrument for propagating the Arab cause against Israel in the U.S. In Saudi Arabia, Muhammad cast a blind eye to the continuing trade in black slaves. This was the year journalist Mike Wallace gave the Black Muslims their first major national publicity. The reaction was not favorable, and mainstream civil rights leaders denounced Muhammad’s separatist agenda as well as his alignment with Nasser.⁴⁶

The Six Day War and Its Reverberations

As the decade of the 1960s unfolded, African American opinion shifted increasingly away from a liberal integrationist agenda toward an emphasis on Black Nationalist militancy and Pan Africanism. Yet this shift in attitudes did not improve African Americans toward the Jews’ parallel Zionist project.

Amidst efforts by black separatists to expel white (mostly Jewish) members from its ranks, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) set off a firestorm in June, 1967, when it published a newsletter full of anti-Semitic articles and cartoons including a photo of Israelis shooting Arabs during the 1967 War over the caption: “This is the Gaza Strip, Palestine, not Dachau, Germany.” Readers were told “Zionists conquered Arab homes and land through terror, force, and massacres.” The magazine of the violent Black Panther Party followed with an “anti-Zionist” poem threatening: “We’re gonna piss upon the Wailing Wall.”⁴⁷

In September, 1968, at the National Convention on New Politics in Chicago, the Black Caucus forced through a resolution (later rescinded) condemning “Zionist imperialism.” This resolution profoundly embarrassed Reverend King who spoke at the event. Even before SNCC entered the fray, the Nation of Islam sharply denounced Israel. The irony was that Israel’s harshest critics among Black Nationalists continued to model their own movement on Zionism. In 1964, the year before he was felled by an assassin’s bullet, Malcolm X declared: “Pan Africanism will do for the people of African descent all over the world, the same that Zionism has done for Jews all over the world.” A few years later, Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panther averred: “The Jews did it. It worked. So now Afro-Americans must do the same thing.” Following the rise of the Black Power Movement in 1965, Shlomo Katz, editor of the Zionist magazine, *Midstream*, tried to reach out half way by urging “Jews who think along Zionist lines [to be] more sensitive to the emerging pattern of Negro evolution . . . because of the numerous similarities between the two groups.”⁴⁸

There was no such rapprochement because Black Nationalists became inflexible critics of Israel. They no longer viewed Ethiopia as a bridge between Black Africa and the Holy Land. Instead, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) of SNCC and the Black Panther Party rejected biblical Ethiopianism as “ignorance manipulated by Zionism,” and enlisted under Nasser’s banner: “We are Africans wherever we are. [Israel] is moving to take over Egypt. Egypt is our motherland—it’s in Africa.” The transformation of Israel in Black Nationalist minds was complete—from an anticolonial David battling the British Goliath to an imperialist ally of America’s Philistines, intent on conquering the Egyptian frontier of African anticolonialism.⁴⁹

It’s important to note, however, that moderate mainstream civil rights leaders like Whitney Young, Bayard Rustin, and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., continued to subscribe to the old pro-Israel gospel. Just before the Six Day War began in June, 1967, Rev. King signed on to an open letter in the *New York Times* by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and others urging President Johnson to honor the American commitment to Israel. Yet King was sharply from within as well as without his inner circle for too closely identifying with “the Zionist Jew” and compromising his pacifist principles. Though shaken and forced to abort a planned Mideast trip, King did not retreat. Responding to a hostile question during a 1968 speech, he declared: “When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You are talking anti-Semitism.”⁵⁰

Interviewed by the editor of *Conservative Judaism* on March 25, 1968, just ten days before his assassination in Memphis, King declared:

I see Israel, and never mind saying it, as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can almost be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security and that security must be a reality.⁵¹

From the Yom Kippur War of 1973 Andrew Young Resignation in 1979

The 1970s began with mainstream civil rights leaders’ “An Appeal by Black Americans for United States Support for Israel” in the *New York Times*. Yet the public opinion polls already showed troubling evidence of high levels of anti-Jewish prejudice among African Americans, coupled with lukewarm support for Israel compared to whites.⁵²

There was a battle for the control of African American opinion between anti-Israel and pro-Israel leaders. Meeting in Gary, Indiana, in March, 1972, the National Black Political Convention initially passed a resolution (subsequently toned down) blaming Israel for “fascist aggression” in the Middle East and “working hand-in-hand with other imperialistic interests in Africa.” The outbreak of the 1973 War precipitated a counter positive reaction toward the Jewish state with 15 African American Congressmen cosponsoring a resolution urging U.S. military resupply of Israel, and 75 black labor leaders calling on African Americans to “stand with Israel in its

struggle to live and be free.” In the same spirit, civil rights leader Bayard Rustin spearheaded the formation of BASIC—Black Americans in Support of Israel Committee—in 1975.⁵³

After the Arab oil embargo resulted in 21 Black African suspending diplomatic relations with Israel, the UN General Assembly in November, 1975, passed its “Zionism equals racism” resolution. Only four African nations—the Central African Republic, the Africa Coast, Liberia, Malawi, and Swaziland—voted against, and nine abstained, while nine others tried unsuccessfully to stall the vote. The month before the passage of the resolution, Uganda’s Idi Amin spoke before the General Assembly calling for “the extinction of Israel.” When America’s UN Ambassador called Amin “a racist murderer,” African American press reaction was split. And when Mayor Abe Beame refused Egyptian President Anwar Sadat New York’s hospitality, the *Amsterdam News* noted pointedly that “many New Yorkers feel the two [Zionism and racism] are connected.” Roy Wilkins, head of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, wrote that “Negroes who ought to be experts on racism” should know better than to equate the two.⁵⁴

Spurned by virtually all the Third World, including Black Africa nations, Israel had decided in 1974 to reinstate diplomatic relations with South Africa, and to expand trade relations including sale of military equipment. Its rationale that both the Arab states and black African nations traded with South Africa was true but not well received by African Americans who expected from Israel “a higher standard.” In 1976, Bayard Rustin understandably challenged the American Jewish community to speak out against Israel’s South African ties.⁵⁵

Then, American Jews in general and Zionists in particular were unfairly blamed in 1979 for the resignation of the first African American to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, following revelations that he had a secret meeting against American policy with a PLO representative and lied about it. Even Bayard Rustin was among 200 prominent black leaders signing an angry statement criticizing Israel. Jesse Jackson spoke for many when he said: “The real resistance to black progress has been coming from the Ku Klux Klan but from our former allies in the American Jewish community.” Having received a \$3 million nonrepayable “loan” from Libya’s Qaddafi in 1972, the Black Muslims stated “the fact” that Tel Aviv was responsible for Young’s ouster. The NAACP adopted a resolution urging the Carter Administration to reexamine its pledge to Israel not to negotiate with the PLO.⁵⁶

Jackson-Farrakhan “Diplomacy”: 1979-1980

Beginning in 1979, African American critics of Israel went on the offensive through the new medium of “peace missions” to the Middle East that invariably embarrassed the Jewish state. Grasping the mortally-wounded Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the balcony of Memphis Lorraine Motel in April, 1968, Jesse Jackson also seized his leadership mantle. By 1979, he was ready for the opening presented by the Andrew Young debacle. Having already visited Libya in 1972, Jackson went to the Middle East in September, 1979, in response to an invitation from

Yasser Arafat. Leaders of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference were also invited, but Jackson dominated, visiting Israel as well as Arafat in Lebanon and other Arab countries. Jackson was denied a meeting by Prime Minister Begin, but he was hoisted on the shoulders of Palestinian youths in Nablus shouting "Jackson! Arafat!" Jackson was treated like a visiting head of state by Anwar Sadat and Hafez al-Assad. Though his attempt to broker Israeli recognition of the PLO in return for a pause in terrorist violence went nowhere, he proclaimed his mission a triumph. Returning to the U.S., he abandoned any pretense of even-handedness by announcing that he accepted substantial Arab donations to his Operation PUSH-Breadbasket and declaring Zionism "a poisonous reed."⁵⁷

Jackson's 1979 peace mission proved just a trial run for his foray in 1984 to Syria to retrieve captured black pilot Robert O. Goodman, Jr., shot down by the Syrians over eastern Lebanon. By this time Jackson's "rainbow coalition" was preparing his run in the 1984 presidential primaries. Ultimately, his candidacy was fatally embarrassed by his association with Louis Farrakhan, Elijah Muhammad's successor as head of the Nation of Islam. Providing security for Jackson's primary campaign, Farrakhan exploited the relationship to catapult himself into the spotlight as an African American leader in his own right. In 1984, he staged his own high-profile pilgrimage to Qaddafi's Libya which gave the NOI another \$5 million "loan." Farrakhan's inflammatory anti-Semitic, anti-Israel statements deepened strained Black-Jewish relations. Calling Hitler "a great man," Farrakhan claimed that his equally notorious statement—"there can never be any peace structured on injustice, thievery, lying, deceit, and using God's name to shield your dirty religion"—was aimed not at Judaism but at Zionism. This interpretation gave little solace to friends of Israel.⁵⁸

From Ethiopia to Israel

Zionists in the U.S. and Israel did not abandon the efforts to build bridges to Africans and African Americans. Crucial in this connection were Operation Moses in 1984-1985 and Operation Solomon in 1991 that airlifted to Israel, respectively, 6,500 and over 14,000 Ethiopian Beta Israel into the Jewish state. These uplifting successes have not received the attention they deserve from African American critics of Israel who prefer to focus on problems that Ethiopian newcomers have faced in integrating into the Jewish state. For example, Gloria Naylor set her 1992 novel, *Bailey's Café*, in 1948, decades before the airlifts. The child hero, the son of an Ethiopian Jewish teenager named Mariam, ends up in a homeless shelter in New York because there is no place for him among Jews either in America or Israel.⁵⁹

Similarly, the African American press gave less space to the broader experience of the Ethiopian Jews in Israel than to the controversial experience of the small sect of Black Hebrew Israelites from the U.S. who first settled in the Negev at Dimona in the 1960s. This sect's conflict with the Israeli government have been made into a negative metaphor by critics of Israel who portray the Jewish state as a racist society. Yet the truth experience at Dimona of the Black Hebrew

Israelites can instead be read as the story of how virtually anybody who claims to be a Jew can—with enough imagination and persistence—become an Israeli.⁶⁰

A Chicago sect, the Black Hebrew Israelites crystallized in the 1960s around the conviction that they were the authentic “blood descendents of the ancient Hebrews.” Initially, their predominant messianic hope centered on a “return,” not to Israel, but to Africa. In 1967, timed to coincide with Passover, 60 members of the sect under the leadership of Ben Ammi (“Son of My People”) Carter, established a tent colony near Liberia’s capitol of Monrovia. But once in Liberia, the Black Hebrew Israelites began to disagree. One sect leader, Nasi Shaliach Ben Yehuda (Louise Bryant), who had always wanted to go to Israel, which she considered “northeastern Africa,” was impressed by Israeli foreign aid projects in Liberia. She sent an agent to scout out the Jewish state. There followed from Liberia 20 Black Hebrew Israelites who arrived in 1968 and were granted tourist status and settled in Arad. In 1969, by Ben Ammi Carter and 47 additional followers left Liberia for Israel. A third group arrived in 1970.⁶¹

The Black Hebrew Israelite settlement in Dimona experienced friction with its neighbors who, among other things, accused the sect of practicing polygamy. Carter’s followers claimed to be “Torah True Hebrews”—not Jews—yet demanded status under the Law of Return. When it was denied, Carter refused to allow sect members to convert to Judaism and instead escalated his rhetorical attacks by claiming that “Israel will be a country run totally by black men,” and that the UN had given the country to “false Jews” and “white Israelite racists” in 1948. He also complained that Israel was “a racist, Jim Crow country like South Africa.” As Black Hebrew Israelites further splintered into factions, members quarreled with the Israeli government over housing benefits and work permits.⁶²

The tenacious Ben Ammi Carter escalated the dispute by corresponding with the Egyptian government, with which Israel was still at war, and by reaching out to Louis Farrakhan who visited Dimona in 1978, as did Farrakhan’s notoriously anti-Semitic deputy, Khalid Abdul Muhammed. Farrakhan, who knew Ben Ammi Carter from Chicago, explained they shared parallel approaches to ending white dominance: “they’re coming at it from the point of view of the Torah, and we’re coming at it from the point of view of the Koran.”⁶³

In 1981, the pro-Israel African American group, BASIC, sponsored a fact-finding mission to the Middle East, headed by Bayard Rustin. The delegation insisted that the Black Hebrew Israelites be treated humanely while in Israel, but did not deny that the Israeli government had the right to deport them. Rustin criticized Ben Ammi Carter as “a dictator.” In September, 1981, when Prime Minister Begin conferred with more than 25 African American leaders at the Waldorf in New York, they also grilled him about the plight of the Black Israelites. There followed another decade of stalemate before a settlement was finally reached normalizing the Black Hebrew Israelites presence in Israel.⁶⁴

Precarious Balance Since 1990

After a quarter of a century of deterioration, African American attitudes toward Zionism and Israel stabilized at a level of low to moderate favorability. At long last, the log jam over the Black Hebrew Israelites was broken. Illinois legislators brokered an agreement, negotiated in 1990, and finalized in 1992, permitting them to hold jobs and receive social benefits. Ben Ammi Carter moderated his rhetoric against white Jews. Permanent status, including the right to serve in the Army, was granted to the Black Hebrew Israelites in 2002. That year, a Black Israelite—the first born in Israel—was killed by Palestinian terrorists at his Bar Mitzvah.⁶⁵

Jesse Jackson showed new maturity in 1990 in a speech before the World Jewish Congress accepting Zionism as “a national liberation movement.” Beginning in 1991, the negotiations leading to the Oslo Peace Accords facilitated reduced African American criticism of Israel. The ADL did what it could to promote good relations by inviting to the U.S. Ethiopian Jewish teenagers from Israel to speak on inner city high school campuses. All this contributed to the new mood that resulted in the repeal of the UN’s “Zionism equals racism” resolution in 1991.⁶⁶

When the United States went to war with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq in 2003, extremists who scapegoated Jewish “neocons” and “the Israel Lobby” as responsible for the conflict were predominately white. The only prominent African American critic was Louis Farrakhan. In declining health, he visited Iraq in 2002 on his “Peace Initiative Tour.” Banned from entering Israel, Farrakhan made the unsubstantiated claim that “I could have gotten an agreement from the Palestinians . . . on a moratorium, for 90-120 days on this suicide bombing.”⁶⁷

In 2008, Farrakhan shared the stage as a harsh critic of Israel with previously little-known Reverend Jeremiah Wright of Chicago’s Trinity United Church of Christ. Wright was catapulted into national prominence in 2008 by his personal association with presidential candidate Barack Obama—much as Farrakhan had been by his friendship with Jesse Jackson in 1984. In fact, that year Wright had actually accompanied Farrakhan to Libya. Subsequently, Wright condemned Israel as a practitioner of “state terrorism,” and used his “Pastor’s Page” to promote Arab propaganda pieces. In June, 2007, he reprinted an “Open Letter to Oprah from Ali Baghdadi on her visit to Palestine” claiming that “South Africa allowed Israel to test its nuclear weapons in the ocean off South Africa. The Israelis were given a blank check; they could test whenever they desired and did not even have to ask permission. Both worked on an ethnic bomb that killed Blacks and Arabs.”⁶⁸

Reverend Wright was a practitioner “Black Liberation Theology” pioneered by Rev. James Cone whose book, *The Black Messiah* (1968), argued that Jesus was black. Wright’s other major debt was to anti-Israel Latin American “Liberation theologians” who strip the Exodus narrative of Jewish content in order to portray the bible as a Marxist revolutionary manual. As Obama’s successful Democratic presidential campaign gathered momentum, Wright used his status as Obama’s long-time pastor to gain an invitation to speak before the National Press Club in

Washington, D.C. Wright's controversial statements embarrassed Obama who repeatedly expressed his support for Israel's security. He succeeded in reassuring American Jews, an estimated 78 percent of whom voted for him for president in November, 2008.⁶⁹

Black-Jewish ties remained strong, at least at the ballot box. And Israel's example continued to exert powerful sway on African American activists like Randall Robinson. Robinson founded the international lobby, TransAfrica, that helped topple South Africa's apartheid regime. He then has made Germany's reparations to Israel after World War II into a model for his campaign for reparations for descendants of Africans and African Americans victimized by the slave trade and slavery.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Translating metaphors into faith, Africans and African Americans for generations have built proud identities and communities around "Black Judaism" and "Black Zionism." And where myth and faith lead science has followed by buttressing the Judaic rites and ancestral lore of the Bantu-speaking Lemba people of Southern Africa whose "Jewish" kinship claims now rest on the additional foundation of DNA "genetic archeology" showing many Lemba men carry a Y chromosome polymorphism, known as "the Cohen modal haplotype," tracing back to Judaism's priestly Cohanim. Long before modern Zionists envisaged a global Jewish homecoming, Israel may have been joined at the hip with Africa—and not only in Egypt and Ethiopia.⁷¹

Anti-Israel detractors who continue to vilify "Zionism as racism" are protesting too much. From the Hebrew prophets, to Edward Wilmot Blyden and Theodore Herzl, to the Ingathering in Israel of Ethiopia's Beta Israel and the normalization of the Israeli status of the Black Hebrew Israelites, both Judaism as a religion and Zionism as a national creed have shown the "big tent" capacity to bring Jews, Africans, and African Americans together not as strangers but as brothers and sisters in struggles for civil rights as well as national liberation. Let's hope the past will prove to be prologue.

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² Paul Lewis, "U.N. Repeals Its '75 Resolution Equating Zionism With Racism," *New York Times*, December 17, 1991, at <<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/17/world/un-repeals-its-75-resolution-equating-zionism-with-racism.html>>; Kenneth S. Stern, *Anti-Zionism: The Sophisticated Anti-Semitism* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1990), at <http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/737.PDF>.

³ “Text: Obama’s Cairo Speech,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2009, at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/us/politics/04obama.text.html?_r=1; Harold Brackman, “Obama’s Amnesia About Zionism,” *Jerusalem Post*, November 29, 2009, at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1259243034243&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FPrinter>.

⁴ Michael Berkowitz in *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 144-64, finds much unrealistic optimism among Zionists about the future of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine, but negligible evidence of “racism.” Their conception of “the new Zionist man” also emphasized spiritual qualities—not race. See Jacob Golomb, *Neitzsche and Zion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 30-32.

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⁶ Lynch, “A Black Nineteenth-Century Response to Jews and Zionism,” pp. 45-46; Edward Wilmot Blyden, *From West Africa to Palestine* (Manchester: John Heywood, 1873).

⁷ Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, p. 121; Lynch, “A Black Nineteenth-Century Response to Jews and Zionism,” p. 50; Edward Wilmot Blyden, *The Jewish Question* (Liverpool: Lionel Hart, 1898). Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, p. 121; Lynch, “A Black Nineteenth-Century Response to Jews and Zionism,” p. 50; Edward Wilmot Blyden, *The Jewish Question* (Liverpool: Lionel Hart, 1898).

⁸ Blyden, *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, ed. Hollis R. Lynch (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1971), pp. 210-11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 211-14.

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¹⁴ Robert A. Hill, “Black Zionism: Marcus Garvey and the Jewish Question,” in *African American and Jews in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Convergence and Conflict*, ed. V. P. Franklin, Nancy L. Grant, Harold M. Kletnick, and Genna Rae McNeil (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 49.

¹⁵ Robert A. Hill, “Black Zionism: Marcus Garvey and the Jewish Question,” pp. 40-41, 50; Edmund David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 128; Edith Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 80; Weisbord and Kazarian, Jr., *Israel in the Black American Perspective*, p. 17.

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