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Black and Jewish Relations: The
Legacy of Rabbi David Einhorn

By

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Dean

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I am honored that Jerold L. Jacobs, the Chairman of the 49th Annual Convention of the Virginia State Association of B'nai B'rith Lodges, has invited me to keynote the Installation Reception and Banquet of the new officers of this Lodge.

Since the mid-1960's, there has been considerable discussion on Black-Jewish relations in America. It is not a new issue. In fact, Black-Jewish relations began prior to the Civil War.**

I

Prior to the Civil War, Jewish merchants of Newport, Rhode Island, were active in the "triangle trade" which brought African slaves to the colonies. Jewish residents of the slave states bought Blacks for use on their plantations and in their homes and some made their living from slave marketing.

* Before the 49th Annual Convention of the Virginia State Association of B'nai B'rith Lodges, National Clarion Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, May 16, 1987.

** I am indebted to the scholarship of Bertram Wallace Korn's, American Jewry and the Civil War, Chapter 3, (1951) for much of the information that follows in Part I of this address.

In the political area, Jews were to be found on both sides of the question: Whether slavery was an immoral act of the state?

Several prominent Jewish leaders favored the institution of slavery. For example, Mordecai M. Noah, the publisher of New York newspapers spoke out in favor of slavery, as well as New York state senators Judah P. Benjamin and David Lulee. J.F. Moses of Lumpkin, Georgia, was a key slave trader, and Robbie J. M. Michelbacker of Richmond is said to have been completely convinced of the justice of the enslavement of Blacks.

So intense was the anti-Black view of some Jews that on January 23, 1863, The Jewish Record wrote:

We know not how to speak in the same breath of the Negro and the Israelite.... There is no parallel between such races. Humanity from pole to pole would scout such a comparison. The Hebrew was originally (original emphasis) free.... The Negro was never free ... The judicious in all the earth agree that to proclaim the African equal to the surrounding races, would be a farce....

One of the most prominent rabbis of the pre-war era made national news for his pro-slavery stance. His name was Dr. Morris J. Raphall of New York City. On February 4, 1861, Rabbi Raphall delivered a speech entitled, "The Bible View of Slavery." In this speech, Rabbi Raphael placed Judaism against the position of the abolitionists. Rabbi Raphael asserted that the Bible could not be interpreted as prohibiting slavery. He chal-

lenged prominent abolitionist ministers such as Henry Ward Beecher to prove the contrary. Rabbi Raphall did not believe that the enslavement of Blacks was a sin. According to Jewish historian Bertram Wallace Korn, Rabbi Raphall's "sermon aroused more comment and attention than any other sermon delivered by an American rabbi" during that period.

Rabbi Raphall's sermon was given wide circulation and was published in Virginia in The Richmond Daily Dispatch. His speech caused former Virginia Governor Wyndham Robertson to invite Richmond rabbis to open the daily sessions of the Virginia House of Delegates.

Michael Heilprin, a Polish-Jewish intellectual, was the first Jewish spokesman to rebut Rabbi Raphall's assertions. Heilprin's words demonstrate his absolute disagreement to the views of Rabbi Raphall. Heilprin termed Raphall's views as "nonsense" and called the sermon false and barbaric. Heilprin stated, "still being a Jew myself, [I am] outraged by the sacriligious words of the Rabbi."

Heilprin's rebuttal no doubt caused others like Dr. Moses Mielziner, then principal of the Jewish school at Copenhagen to take a view as well as Professor Francis Lieber of Columbia University.

Raphall's sermon was also refuted in England by Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, who later became rabbi of Temple Emanu-El of New York City. Gottheil concluded that he found no justification for slavery "in the Bible nor in Jewish history."

On the other hand, it is reported that there were other Jews in the South as well as the North who "out of personal kindness or in keeping with their general convictions, freed their slaves." Indeed, the "records of the Manumission Society of New York City preserved the names of many Jews who emancipated [Blacks]."

There were several other prominent Jewish leaders who openly spoke out against slavery. Listed in these ranks were men such as Isidor Bush of St. Louis, Missouri, and Philip J. Joachimsen of New York. Other Jews made statements in a variety of ways. For example, Seligman Kakeles of New York named his first-born American child after the abolitionist leader Gerrit Smith. Judah Touro freed his own slaves. One Michael Heilprin was reportedly assaulted by an angry mob because of his anti-slavery views during a Democratic Party meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1858.

There is one rabbi whose opposition to slavery stands out and to whom my remarks are dedicated. His name is Rabbi David Einhorn.

Rabbi Einhorn's public opposition to slavery began in 1856. He also launched an attack against the pro-slavery views of Rabbi Raphall his monthly publication, Sinai. Einhorn was incensed at Raphall's views, stating, if a Christian had said Judaism was pro-slavery, all Jews, from the extremest orthodox wing to the most radical reformers, would have "call[ed] the

wrath of heaven and earth upon such falsehoods."

Rabbi Einhorn aligned himself with the anti-slavery views of Michael Helprin and Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, all who "perceived fundamental relationship between the rights of the Jew and the rights of the Negro." Rabbi Einhorn "saw no possibility of freedom for minorities in an atmosphere which condoned the enslavement of any people." To set people outside the door of opportunity and equality was unacceptable to Rabbi Einhorn.

Rabbi Einhorn's open advocacy and especially his public disagreement with Rabbi Raphall's pro-slavery stance brought threats against Einhorn in Baltimore. So intense was the pro-slavery and abolitionist "Baltimore Jews who belonged to other congregations were forced to state in the public press that they did not accept his leadership." Several people were killed and printing presses, "including those which printed Einhorn's Sinai were destroyed. Rabbi Einhorn was urged to flee. Riots broke out in Baltimore over the Einhorn controversy. On the fourth day of the rioting, Rabbi Einhorn in fear that his family would be harmed fled Baltimore, never to return."

Rabbi Einhorn is my hero. However, he was not the only hero of the pre-war years. Rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal of Chicago also deserves credit for his anti-slavery stands. In the late 1850's, Rabbi Felsenthal "refused to apply for the rabbinical position in Mobile, Alabama, because he felt that he could not live at peace with himself in a slave environment."

At the time, Felsenthal was the rabbi of Sinai Temple in Chicago. When the death blow of the slave system was in sight, Rabbi Falsenthal wrote:

Four millions of men, children of the same heavenly Father, descendants of the same Adam, were held in slavery! And now they will be free ... Still many more millions of white people languished in slavery. They were fettered by the shackles of prejudices... The fetters of prejudices are broken. The white people have become emancipated just as well as the black people. The abolitionists were the true statesmen of the nation....

II.

Slavery is considered the holocaust of Black people in America. Hence, it should be important to the Black and Jewish communities alike to recognize and salute Jews such as Rabbi David Einhorn who took a stand on the immorality of slavery. (See P. Johnson, A History of the Jews 369 (1987) (Einhorn mentioned.)) Black America also notes that there were Jews who opposed or who remained neutral on the question of the liberation of Blacks from the immoral conditions of slavery.

It is my belief, though not empirically supported, that Black and Jewish people have staked out their relationships on the basis of those who have taken a stand for the liberation of the other group. On the other hand, Blacks have been called anti-semitic by Jews and Jews have been called racist by Blacks

where both groups have so isolated themselves from each other that the common goal of equality that we share has become blurred.

Blacks must face the fact that there are Jews who do not like Black people for no other reason than that they are Black. I assert that this is wrong. Jews must face the fact that there are Blacks who do not like Jewish people for no other reason than that they are Jews. I assert that this is wrong.

Twenty years ago, Shloma Katz edited a book entitled, Negro and Jew. In the preface of this book Katz wrote, "It is widely accepted ... that there exists a pronounced anti-Jewish sentiment among the Negro masses in this country..." Katz continued, "many Jews ... react with special resentment to anti-Semitic sentiments among Negroes..." Katz also wrote that "leaders among Negroes have tended to underestimate the importance of the manifestations of anti-Jewishness among Negroes." On the other hand, Katz wrote that "many Jews become defensive and tend to blame Negroes for part of their woes" withdrawing "financial and other support they have previously given to the cause of Negro freedom."

I do not know, nor will I conclude today, whether the estimation reached by Katz on Black-Jewish relations in 1967 was accurate. However, I will state that the Black-Jewish relations since the Bakke opinion have given rise to greater tensions between both of our groups. I only hope that the spirit of Rabbi David Einhorn will be honored and emulated by the Jewish community as Blacks face and directly resist the ominous

clouds of affirmative racial attitudes that cover the skies over Blacks today.

Let me highlight exactly what I mean. In the past three months of this year, the press has reported widely on the resurgence of racial attacks against Black people in this country, on college campuses and elsewhere. For example,

- ° On February 6, a member of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination reported that a melee among students on the Amherst Campus of the University of Massachusetts after the last World Series game was racially motivated. (See, Wald, Racism Blamed for Brawl at U. of Massachusetts, N.Y. Times, Feb. 6, 1987 at A12, col. 4.)
- ° On February 7, two white teenagers were disciplined for attacking Black youths in Newton, Massachusetts. (See, 2 Blamed in Racial Attack, Wash. Post, Feb. 7, 1987, at A5, col. 5.)
- ° On February 18, a New York Times reporter questioned whether in the wake of recent racial confrontations in urban New York and rural Georgia, institutional racism known in the 1950's are back in the 1980's. (See Williams, Marching on Racism: Practical or Passe? N.Y. Times, Feb. 18, 1987 at A23, col. 1.)
- ° On March 1, 1987, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported on the racial tensions in Princeton, New Jersey, arising from the inability of Blacks to walk

the streets without being stopped and questioned.
(See Bajak, Racial issues surface in Princeton,
The Phil. Inquirer, March 1, 1987, at 3-B, col. 1.)

- ° On March 7, 1987, The Michigan Chronicle reported on the laugh tracks to fill air time between racist jokes called in by listeners and allowed by a radio host to fuel Klu Klux Klan positions against an integrated peace march on the campus of the University of Michigan. (See Gooden, State reps. lead charge against racism at U-M, Mich. Chronicle, March 7, 1987, at 1, col. 3.)
- ° On March 9, 1987, the New York Times reported that the racial incidents at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor were creating a furor among students and worsening. (Wilkerson, Campus Race Incidents Disquiet U. of Michigan, N.Y. Times, March 9, 1987, at A12, col. 1.)
- ° On March 23, 1987, The Washington Post, reported on the all-white Delta Tau Delta Fraternity at George Washington University who advertised "White History Week" during Black History Month. (See Fisher, Blacks Seek Visibility on Guild Campus, Wash. Post, March 23, 1987, at D1, col. 1.)
- ° On April 3, 1987, The Wall St. Journal reported on racial incidents and other race encounters at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Amherst

on page one. (See Simpson, Black College Students Are Viewed as Victims of a Subtle Racism, Wall St. J., April 3, 1987, at 1, col. 1.)

- ° On April 10, 1987, The Philadelphia Tribune reported on the dearth of Black professors at Vanderbilt University. (See Vanderbilt University Accedes to Black Demands, Phila. Tribune, April 10, 1987, at 8-A, col. 1.)
- ° On April 18, 1987, the New York Times again reported on a collection of ethnic, racial and other jokes claimed to be offensive at the University of Michigan said by others to be protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. (See Wilkerson, Ethnic Jokes in Campus Computer Prompt Debate, N.Y. Times, April 18, 1987, at 6, col. 1.)
- ° On April 18, 1987, The Chicago Defender reported on the racial unrest and violence at Aurora University in Illinois where Klu Klux Klan insignias were scrawled in four different places on the Aurora University's Music Building. (See Bratcher, Aurora racial tension builds, The Chicago Defender, April 18, 1987, at 1. Col. 1.)
- ° On April 18, 1987, The Chicago Defender reported on similar racial incidents at Purdue University, the University of Alabama and Wellesley College. (See Marable, Racism on White College Compuses, The Chicago Defender, April 18, 1987, at 18, col. 4.)

- On April 18, 1987, The Michigan Chronicle reported racial unrest after racist literature was disseminated to high school students in St. Clair Shores, Michigan. (Goodin, Shores Blacks air race concerns, Michigan Chronicle, April 18, 1987, at 1, col. 4.)
- On April 22 and 23, 1987, the New York Times reported that racial sparks flared on the campus of Columbia University -- again -- between Blacks and whites. (See 9 are Arrested in Anti-Racism Protest at Columbia, N.Y. Times, April 22, 1987, at B3, col. 1; Carmody, Columbia Reports Cites Racial Unrest, N.Y. Times, April 23, 1987, at B2, col. 1.)
- On May 9, 1987, The New York Times race discrimination charges were raised at the Missouri University in Columbia, Missouri, involving the attitude of white instructors. (See Bias Is Charged at Missouri U., N.Y. Times, May 4, 1987, at A22, col. 3.)

Who among us can say that racism is dead and that Black people are, as the Justice Department claims, exaggerating a non-existent problem. (See Justice Official Denies Racism On Rise in U.S., Washington Post, Feb. 7, 1987, at A4, col. 4; Williams, Lack of Figures On Racial Strife Fueling Dispute, N.Y. Times, April 5, 1987, at 20. col. 1.)

I believe that if Rabbi David Einhorn were alive today, his principles and values would cry out --as they did in 1856 -- against racism practiced against Black people in

America. I believe that Rabbi Einhorn would criticize Jews choosing to remain neutral on acts of racism in this country and the apartheid system in South Africa. I hope that you would choose to be equally as critical of such an unjust and criminal system.

Time will not permit me to prolong this invitation to address this distinguished Chapter of the Virginia State Association of B'nai B'rith. The problem of racism and anti-semitism in America at large is far reaching and runs much deeper than any of us want to admit. (See Morgan, U.S. Schools Are Said to Fail in Reducing Bias, N.Y. Times, May 3, 1987 at 55, col. 1.) However, until we face the fact, and are willing to reconcile our collective differences, the absence of a mutually beneficial solution for Jews and Blacks fuels the very flames that could engulf all of us.

Black people cannot and will not forget slavery any more than Jews have pledged never to forget the Holocaust. However, I must say that there are some in the Black community who wonder whether the Jewish community is the foe of Black people. In this regard, the questions raised are associated with the affirmative efforts by some within the Jewish community to water down affirmative action, the failure to publicly denounce the sale of arms by Israel to South Africa, and the silence of the Jewish community on the increased racial attacks against Black people by white supremacists and the Klu Klux Klan, and other vital interest issues faced by the Black community. Black people are not your foe. However, we

need not become each other's foes, or bend so low as to undermine the other. When the very streams of communication that undergird this country are threatened because of spoken and unspoken perceived differences, the historical streams that flow between Blacks and Jews must remain open. Should they close the legacy of Rabbi David Einhorn and Martin Luther King, Jr., will be desecrated and reconciliation will be more difficult. (See M. L. King, Why We Can't Wait 84 (1964)).

Thank you.