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# The Future of Black-Jewish Relations

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*Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia*

It is a pleasure to be here with you this evening and to share with you this discussion of the future of Black and Jewish relations. I'd like to say that our relations in the future are assured by our relations in the past. It is only in the present that we're having a little trouble.

I say that seriously, because there is no culture in the Black community in America, save that culture which we adopted essentially from the Old Testament. Our heritage as slaves brought to these shores does not go back as far as Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, with whom we identify. We identify very strongly with Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea into a Promised Land.

We look to the psalms and to the prophets for guidance constantly. The stories on which we were raised are the stories of Joseph and his coat of many colors, and of other Biblical heroes, and we have tried to understand our struggles in the context of the same book by which you live. Indeed we are and always will be a people of the Book and that past can never be taken from us. And that, amongst other things, I think assures the future.

There is also a sense in which our past includes the sharing in our deliverance. It is no accident that the people who stood with us in the Civil Rights Movement were people who themselves had suffered. I remember one of the ironies of history that occurred twenty years ago during the march from Selma to Montgomery. I think the thing that caught the conscience of the American people more than anything else was the fact that the march from Selma to Montgomery and the beating on the Edmund Pettus Bridge was put on television immediately following a film on Nuremburg. Americans began to make the link between Nazi Germany and the attack by Sheriff Jim Clark and Al Lingo's posse on people, and they saw the same kind of violence and oppression and fascism that had brought suffering to millions of Jews in Europe beginning to reemerge here. And the people said no, that shall not happen in America. That heritage binds us together, the heritage that led to the killings in Mississippi in 1964 when two of the three young men who were killed tragically in Philadelphia, Mississippi, were Jewish. Just as there were crosses burned on our lawns, there were also swastikas put on the temples and syna-

gogues. We were bound together in a common struggle against injustice. It is just that in the present we do find differences of interpretation in a far more complex world. We have not taken the time to sit down together and clarify the ethical issues to which we are all dedicated.

Let me say that if the political community is an indication of the voice of the people, as Dr. Williams has said, and I think to some extent it is, then I can answer the question of what happened to the Civil Rights Movement. It went into politics. What is our politics? And does our politics reflect a separation of Blacks and Jews? Absolutely not.

Tom Bradley would not be Mayor of Los Angeles without the support of the Jewish community. Dutch Morial would not be Mayor of New Orleans without the support of the Jewish community. Wilson Goode would not be Mayor of Philadelphia without the support of the Jewish community. Even in Chicago, where there was as tense a Black and Jewish situation as possibly anywhere in the country, Harold Washington was elected with overwhelming support of the Jewish community, with a Jew running against him. And that does not reflect the kinds of tension that one would get from the mass media which seem to say that there is a growing division.

I would contend that everywhere one sees an active political movement growing out of the Civil Rights Movement, one will still see a very active and vibrant Black and Jewish coalition, working together for those same goals, those goals that are very biblical: justice for the poor, peace on earth, the whole notion of a nation under God indivisible and yet maintaining a healthy cultural diversity that respects people in spite of their differences and indeed appreciates them because of their differences, and an understanding that those differences are ordained by God.

But we get into trouble with the question: Who speaks for Blacks? If one would look, as I look, at the Jewish community, the most visible and prominent Jewish leader I hear most from would be Ed Koch. I know the Jewish community well enough to know the perspective in which Ed Koch, or *Commentary* magazine for that matter, represent the breadth and depth of the Jewish community. Yet very few Blacks know the Jewish community well enough to be able to put both Ed Koch and *Commentary* magazine in a kind of perspective that doesn't get them all upset.

By the same token, very few people in the Jewish community know just how to place Jesse Jackson, or Louis Farrakhan. Incidentally, I think they have very little in common, with quite separate agendas, even though they are almost always lumped together in the thinking of the Jewish community. In the Black community there is a

kind of base in almost every Black church that is probably greater than the following that either of those gentlemen would have, and while Jesse Jackson particularly would have tremendous support from the Black community because he dared to stand up and run for President, I doubt that you could get a one hundred percent consensus from the Black community on any particular issue of that campaign.

Jesse won support essentially because he was breaking new ground. Basically we were functioning just like minorities always function. When one of your own gets out on a limb you've got to rally around to support him, whether you like him or agree with him or not. You have been through that time and time again in country after country through history, and now we find ourselves going through it, and it is very hard to know exactly where we stand when we look from opposite sides of the street and one side tries to determine who is speaking for the other side. Only as we sit down together is it going to be possible for us to get enough of a depth of understanding of our two communities. I think that when we sit down together we will realize that we are probably both in the same predicament. Nobody speaks for all Jews, nobody speaks for all Blacks. I can't even speak for my wife and children, much less for a congregation or a city. There is much diversity of opinion in my own household—particularly on the feminist issues with three daughters and an intimidated father—but diversity is one of the facts of life for our nation, and individuality is basic to our concept of freedom, which essentially derives from our individual relationship, and our relationship as a people, to God. God moves in mysterious ways and works with us in ways that only He can understand, and sometimes I think it is important for us to sit together and from our differing theological perspectives ask of each other what in the world is God doing now with us and through us and how in our time we can be faithful to our tradition of justice and mercy and peace.

I think that those things are going to assure a common future and a common unity in that future, but that unity will not be uniformity, and there will never again in a complicated society such as ours be the kind of uniformity of opinion that we had during the Civil Rights Movement period or that there was immediately after the Six Day War or the Yom Kippur War. Events in both communities have become increasingly complicated. I, for one, have no problem supporting Israel. You just have to let me select the faction in Israeli politics that I'd like to support. And I guarantee you there are factions in Israeli politics that I am real tight with and would have no disagreement with, but that's another whole story.

We need to look briefly, though, at the kinds of things that do

divide us because I don't want this to be just a glossing over of differences. There are real differences, significant differences, but I'd like to put these differences in the context of personal relationships too. I had a very warm personal relationship with Morris Abrams. Morris Abrams and I go all the way back to the time when he got Martin Luther King out of jail in 1960, and we served on the Field Foundation Board together. Yet, in the past year or two, I disagreed with Morris Abrams' position essentially on affirmative action and we have a great gulf, but that doesn't mean that I can't stand with him on Soviet Jewry or that he can't stand with me on other questions in the Black community. The question of affirmative action is one that clearly divides us, but do we determine our relationship by those things that divide us or do we remember all of those things that we still hold dear, that we still share in common? In Morris Abrams' view, quotas were always discriminatory, they were always used to keep Jews out, whereas quotas for Blacks have always been used to get people in, so our historical understanding of quotas is absolutely opposite. But that doesn't mean that we are not both committed to justice; we simply haven't had time to sit down and understand how to proceed tactically.

We do have goals and objectives and affirmative action in the City of Atlanta and I have had not one word of disagreement or criticism from anybody in the Jewish community about the fact that our goal is to have thirty-five percent of all contracts let by the City of Atlanta going to minority and female entrepreneurs. We feel that that's necessary. Before Maynard Jackson became Mayor, less than one percent of the contracts for the billions of dollars spent by the City of Atlanta was going to the Black community. In order to redress that historic grievance and in order to move forward together we agreed that we would go together, Black and White together, but that we all had to share in the progress and in the prosperity of moving forward. When we finally decided that we would accept a goal of significant minority involvement as entrepreneurs and employees and also in the engineering and design of a mass transit system, we were able to vote for a mass transit system. We also took the time to consider the poor, because we knew in a sales tax to finance mass transit the poor paid a greater percentage of their income. So we reduced the bus fare from sixty cents to fifteen cents. That formula was negotiated not by a Black mayor but by a Jewish Mayor, Sam Massell. And it was Sam Massell who pulled the community together and said, look, we have to be fair to the Black community; we are going to have a two billion dollar project, and we have to make sure that Black contractors and Black engineers and Black architects and Black bus

drivers and Black managers all participate in the growth and development of the City. And it has worked! And because it worked there it worked at the airport. And those two projects, our airport and our mass transit system, have both been on schedule and under budget, and they have been done with Black and White, Protestants, Catholics and Jews working together.

Incidentally, about half of the joint ventures that were forged by this agreement between Blacks and Whites ended up with Black and Jewish entrepreneurs working together. Nobody complained about it, because it's working. Because we could agree on a new airport and because we could agree on a mass transit system, we attracted seven billion dollars worth of new business to the City of Atlanta and we generated more than 100,000 jobs. We probably have as low an unemployment rate as any area in the country, any major city, and Black unemployment is lower. When we built the fourth runway to that airport just this year, of the one hundred thirty million dollars that went into that project, forty-three percent ended up as minority contracts. There were literally hundreds of families that had jobs, and those families—predominantly Black families—were families that maybe had not worked before. With new job opportunities and new entrepreneurs, the Black contractors and the joint ventures had to go out and train and involve new people.

So we see this not as a moral question, but we see it as essential to representative government. The only government that works in America is a representative government. We don't have a meritocracy, as much as we might like to have one. We have a democracy where you govern only by consent of the governed. Interestingly enough, even some of the Whites who kind of complained about affirmative action did not complain when I appointed a White Police Chief.

We had the embarrassing position of having two Black Ph.D.'s heading our police. One was Public Safety Commissioner and one was Police Chief. When Commissioner Lee Brown went to Houston, creating a vacancy, I looked around and I saw that our police force was top-heavy with Blacks. Working in the police force was a much better job for the Black community than it was for the White community in the sixties, and you had a lot of people who went into the police force with law degrees, with Master's degrees. They rose to the top pretty rapidly, particularly as the politics began to shift overwhelmingly, so we had a Black-dominated police force. One day, when there was a particularly sensitive issue in the White community, they wanted to meet with the leadership of the police force. Everybody who went out was Black, and even though two of them

had Ph.D.s and one of them had a law degree, the White community didn't feel represented. They didn't feel as though anybody really understood them. Now the White Police Chief I appointed was a guy that I had known from the sixties who was eminently qualified as a law enforcement officer, probably one of the best law enforcement officers anywhere in America. He doesn't have a college degree, but he knew our City, he knew the people of our City and he had a Ph.D. mind. As a poor White law enforcement officer he had not had the opportunities to get the same kind of education as others.

When I appointed him Police Chief, the White community cheered. Nobody raised the question of qualifications. His qualifications were that he was White and that they knew him and that they felt comfortable that he understood the plight of the White community. In order for a community to live together, Black and White, all people have to feel comfortable. But we even pushed it a step further, because we made a woman Deputy Chief of Police. That got people a little worried. However, when you stop and think about it, the majority of crimes in an urban area are crimes inflicted on those who are most vulnerable—women, children, and the elderly—and women are more sensitive to the vulnerability of women and children and the elderly than most men are. So we have a woman Deputy Chief of Police sitting in the meetings where all of the decisions are made about law enforcement. And we have a police force that, Black and White, half and half at the top, is bringing crime down month after month in the City of Atlanta. We've had a consistent drop in crime over the last four years. It works. Representative government.

If you have to have goals and objectives to get you to representative government, then those goals and objectives are worthwhile, but those should not in any way be used to discriminate. They should be used to include those people who have been excluded. But that's just one area of difference.

Another big area of difference came out of the Civil Rights Movement. It grew out of the fact that we were a nonviolent movement and that as a nonviolent movement we tended to be anti-military. Just about the time we were getting most militant in our nonviolence, Israel went into the Six Day War and then again the Yom Kippur War, and the need for a military approach to Israel's survival and security became most prevalent.

When Rabbi Heschel was alive we were able at the time of the war in Vietnam to have a strong giant of the Jewish community stand together with us. There was not the feeling, I think, that the Jewish

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community could not criticize the military establishment even when it was wrong because Israel needed the support of the military establishment. We got through the war in Vietnam period because you had two identifiably prophetic leaders, Martin Luther King and Rabbi Heschel, marching again together on the war in Vietnam as they had on behalf of Soviet Jewry, as they had on the march from Selma to Montgomery and many other concerns of justice.

But from there on, it gets increasingly complicated. Do you really trust the Soviet Union in arms negotiations? If they are not being fair to Jews in the Soviet Union and if they violated their word on the treaty in Helsinki, how can you trust them on strategic arms limitation talks?

That's one of the big things that divides us. The Black community is still essentially nonviolent, not only nonviolent in America, but nonviolent in El Salvador, nonviolent in Nicaragua, nonviolent even in South Africa and in the Middle East, and it's because at least a good portion of us are convinced that it is far better to deal with the problems of the world as we did at Panama, or as we did in Zimbabwe ending a fifteen-year civil war, by sitting down and talking—not that we solved every problem but at least we stopped that war, Black against White.

Many of us are convinced that the Middle East is far better off as a result of Camp David than it was as a result of the events surrounding Lebanon, and that there are no military solutions. Military defense can never be questioned or challenged, but there are no military solutions to problems in this world, and that just happens to be an article of faith as far as I am concerned. I say that without telling people when and how they should defend themselves, but essentially at some time or another the lion and the lamb must lie down together, swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. I take seriously the voice of the prophets on peace on earth. Sometimes we think and understand that, in their struggle for survival, the tensions between survival and peace are tensions that the country of Israel and the entire Jewish community are locked into.

I've never had any problem talking with people from Israel, and I get along very well with Israeli politicians from left to right, because they are involved in the struggle and are aware of the complexity, but my feeling sometimes is that the Jewish community feels that it has to take the most right-wing stand in regard to Israel, and only one stand. There is not the freedom of debate and discussion about tactics and strategy in the United States about the Middle East that there is in Israel. And that's one of the things that is going to divide us, and it is one of the things that we are going to have to under-

stand; and I think there is a basis for understanding it, without dividing us. I don't think anybody can decide here how people should make peace in the Middle East. Only the parties to the dispute can be the final determinants of how that dispute is to be reconciled. We can only support the ideals of peace, and pressuring from outside is something that has to be done with a great deal of care.

I say that only because I shift to another area in which we do have things in common; yet even there, tactical problems exist that need serious discussion.

I was really pleased when on Christmas day the Jewish community in Washington took up the march at the South African Embassy. I was also pleased when people from the Black community in New York marched to the Soviet Embassy in support of Soviet Jewry. Those are two things that we agree on in principle, but even there the issues are so complex that we ought to spend more time understanding and determining tactics together and not get caught in what I feel to be demagogic leadership. I define demagogic leadership in a very funny way. I think that when you are appealing to your own community only, not considering the overall situation, it leads to demagoguery, and in our society it doesn't work. I always try to remind people that in George Wallace's time of greatest popularity, when he was the most visible leader in the South and press accounts said George Wallace was the spokesman of the South during the sixties and the early seventies, we as Blacks made all our progress. There is something in this society, thank God, which rises up against demagoguery. Only leaders who really serve their people are leaders who are able to address the majority while they maintain support of their own constituency.

We in the Black community are only ten percent of the population, and the Jewish community is even less. Nothing happens in America unless fifty-one percent understand and agree with it. The true test of a leader is not how emotionally he can stir up his own community. When his community is a minority, the only test of a leader is how can he help to galvanize a majority—in our case another forty percent—to accept the issues and the agenda over which we are struggling as a people. True leadership, whether it be Black or Jewish, is leadership that speaks to the community at large and helps to develop a majority on those concerns for justice and peace and poverty that still are very important to us.

I close by reminding you that we have been a people of struggle whether we are Black or Jewish, and yet we've always been a people of faith. It's been that faith which is expressed most vibrantly in our

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songs—"Let My People Go," "Ezekiel Saw The Wheel," "There Is A Balm In Gilead," "Over My Head I See Freedom in the Air." These are songs of faith, but there is a modern song of faith that perhaps expresses my concerns and my sense of hope for the future. It is a modern gospel spiritual which says simply: "Lord, I don't feel no ways tired, we've come too far from where we started from. Nobody told us that the way would be easy, but I don't believe that He brought us this far to leave us."

## DISCUSSION

*Rabbi Mayer Abramowitz:* Mayor Young, are you aware of the anti-Semitic repercussions which resulted from what you have called the little fracas at the United Nations when you resigned in 1979?

*Rabbi Jacob Shtull:* How does the Black community intend to deal with the issue of Jesse Jackson's pro-PLO position, *vis-a-vis* Jewish concerns in the Middle East?

*Rabbi Daniel Allen:* I wonder, Mr. Mayor, if you couldn't assuage some of the concerns that seem to be running around our Convention by discussing the successful Black-Jewish coalition that is ongoing in Atlanta.

*Mayor Young:* Let me start with the Black-Jewish coalition in Atlanta, because I think it was one of the things that our community thought to do very positively to overcome any misunderstandings that had occurred or were occurring through the campaign of Jesse Jackson or as a result of my actions at the United Nations.

In terms of Jesse Jackson, let me say that I advised Jesse not to run. I supported Walter Mondale. I was booed at the Democratic National Convention because I disagreed with a particular position on Jesse Jackson's platform, which I still disagree with, and I guess that's been as much a problem for me as it has been for you. I am not sure what to do about it, just as I was never sure what to do about dissenting voices throughout the Civil Rights Movement. I think there is a sense in which one has to trust the community, which does select its own leaders.

Insofar as those leaders serve the community, I think they will be supported. I would contend that Jesse Jackson is not anti-Israel. I would not call Jesse Jackson anti-Semitic. And I would not call Ed Koch a racist. I think both of them, in some sense, are victims of

press interpretation of their acts. As politicians under pressure, all of us are subject to an enormous amount of scrutiny. It is very hard to judge another person. Jesse is a very talented, ambitious gentleman who I think has earned the respect of the Black community because he is always there and always visible and saying things that need to be said, but I don't think that Israel is included in that and let me say why.

Many of the same people who voted for Jesse Jackson also voted for the Congressional Black Caucus. The Congressional Black Caucus, with the exception of Ron Dellums, has a very strong record of support of Israel. The only reason it doesn't have Ron Dellums' support is that he refused to support any military expenditure for the United States, for Israel or for anybody else, and that's his particular protest vote. I think the Jewish community in his district understands that as a matter of principle as far as he is concerned. But, as I said before, it's a question of who speaks for the Black community and who represents the feelings of the majority of Black leaders, of Black citizens, and that's a very hard one for me to judge.

Let me go to my situation, which I do know something about and which I do make judgments about. I was President of the Security Council in the month of August. If you remember, this was the time that Jimmy Carter had asked his whole cabinet to resign. It was a period in which he had just come from Camp David, and—what was the statement they used—there was a malaise of the national condition. In the midst of the time when our government was really in a shambles, I had the responsibility, as the President of the Security Council, to preside over the report of the Committee on Palestinian Rights. This was a standing committee of the United Nations. If Arthur Goldberg had been the U.S. Ambassador then, *he* would have had to take that issue when it came up that month. I didn't want it to come up that month, and my meeting with the Arab leadership was an attempt to get them to postpone that issue because it was a no-win issue for them. They had a very good resolution, a resolution which essentially supported 242 and 338 and those resolutions that secure Israel's existence. But in the next sentence they were calling for a Palestinian state, and it was the kind of resolution that the United States would have had to veto. Yet I didn't want to be in a position of vetoing the first Palestinian resolution that essentially began to give support to the survival and existence of the State of Israel. So I thought I would meet with the Arab group and the PLO representatives, something which I did many times. Before I went to the United Nations, I said to Jimmy Carter and to Cy Vance that I did not believe in not talking to people, and that with my back-

ground I believed that you had to maintain conversations with your adversaries, and so I talked to a lot of folks. It was always public and it was always in the context of the U.N. meetings. Yet I knew this was controversial and my mistake, I think, was doing it in private. It was not done in secret. It was known by the State Department, though I did not ask their permission. It was reported to them, and they got mad with me when remarks were made about it in Israel, because it was reported in Israel also, and they issued the statement which was a rather bland denial that we had had a meeting. They said it was a casual meeting where no negotiations took place, and which did not imply recognition. And that was true, theoretically. We were talking procedure, not substance, and by State Department gobbledygook they were not lying. But I had a very good relationship with Ambassador Blum of Israel, and I knew he would not believe that, and I wanted him to know exactly what went on. So again, without asking State Department approval, I went to Ambassador Blum's office. I sat down and I gave him a full accounting of the meeting, which he reported to Jerusalem, and I was caught in the middle. I thought the only thing you have in diplomacy is the sense of truth and honesty, and when you start shading the meaning you know you are destroying your credibility.

I had a very good relationship with the Israeli Ambassador, and I had a very good relationship with Arab Ambassadors, because I told them exactly like it was. During the time that I was at the United Nations there was not a single time when Israel was defamed in any resolution in the Security Council. Even when resolutions were attempted in the General Assembly we were able, with one exception, to defuse those and to have the Arab group maintain some control over the Arab militants in the United Nations.

And so I simply saw it as doing my job. And I insist that I was doing my job and that I did not violate either the integrity of our relationship with Israel or my responsibilities as Ambassador to the United Nations, but it was never reported that way in the press. There was a kind of firestorm in New York that went nationwide.

Once this all began to be trouble I typed my resignation and took it to Washington. And there was no asking for it, nor did I discuss it with anybody. I presented it, and when they asked me to reconsider I said no. And the reason I said no was that I would have been required, I think, to give in to the things that I didn't believe in. But I had no idea that it would go quite so far. I even looked at it as something that, insofar as I could control it, essentially would lead to a redefinition of the relationship between the Black and the Jewish communities. And I would contend that, even though there was an

explosion, the explosion was not just a result of my meeting; it was a result of our taking for granted a relationship from a period of roughly 1968 to 1978 or 1979—a ten-year period when there was little or no dialogue or discussion between the Black and the Jewish communities.

Since that time, I think we've been conscious of the problem and in many parts of the nation we have been actively doing something about restoring that relationship. I hope that my being here tonight is just one more illustration of the fact that that relationship—in spite of all that has gone on—has not been seriously damaged, that there is essentially a continuing commitment to many of the same values, that our differences are differences of tactics, and that they are differences which we can discuss, and if we can't resolve those differences, we can develop some understanding of and some respect for the positions on which we differ.

Let me close by saying that the problems which exist are extremely complicated. I think that both communities are poorly served by the use of the words racist or anti-Semitic. When we use those words we are essentially dismissing people and putting them in an enemy camp. I think that it is possible, particularly in our relationships, to understand the deeper insecurities and anxieties that lead us to do the things we do and say the things we say. As we gain a deeper understanding, I think that any tendency toward racism or anti-Semitism can be withstood together by a new level of understanding and common commitment.

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