

# Black Antisemitism in America: Past and Present

Eunice G. Pollack | June 1, 2022

**Eunice G. Pollack, a professor of history and Jewish studies (ret.), University of North Texas, analyzes how racialized forms of antisemitism and anti-Zionism took shape, spread, and intensified among Blacks in the US from the era of Malcolm X through the current Black Lives Matter movement.**

Beginning in the early 20th century, American Jews had been Blacks' foremost ally in the struggle for integration and racial justice. This article explores how, when, why, and by whom this alliance was challenged and then sundered, increasingly replaced by Blacks' strong bond with Arabs, especially Palestinian Arabs, whom they identified as fellow anti-racist people of color. It traces the expansion and intensification of the racialized forms of antisemitism/anti-Zionism among Blacks that accompanied the unraveling of the alliance with Jews and the development of the new attachment to Arabs from the 1960s to the present—and examines the responses—and non-responses—of Black and Jewish leaders to the spreading poison.

## Introduction—In the Beginning

From the mid-1960s, barely a generation after the Holocaust—when corporate America had begun to hire Jews, universities had set aside their Jewish quotas, and covenants barring the sale of houses to Jews were disappearing—Black militants, often Black nationalists, began to mount a full-throated assault on Jews and the Jewish state. From these years until the present, polls regularly revealed not only significantly greater percentages of American Blacks than Whites endorsed antisemitic tropes, but that the animus was “strongest among younger, better-

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educated . . . blacks” (Schneider, 1984). A study conducted in 1970 ranked 73% of Blacks in their twenties, as opposed to 35% who were fifty and older, as high on its index of antisemitism. Unlike during the Civil Rights Movement, by 1978 a survey of “black leaders” found that 81% agreed that “Jews chose money over people” and in a 1975 poll, about two-thirds were “indifferent to whether Israel existed as a state” (Friedman, 1995). Overall assessments of the incidence of antisemitism among Blacks and Whites revealed stark differences: in 1981, 42% of Blacks, as opposed to 20% of Whites, agreed that “Jews have too much power in the United States” (Schneider, 1984). About a quarter century later, in 2005, the divide persisted: 36% of African Americans held “strong antisemitic beliefs”—four times the percentage of Whites (Anderson, 2005). The racial gulf was evident even within political categories: in 2020, 42% of “black liberals” versus 15% of “white liberals” endorsed antisemitic “stereotypes” (Sales, 2021).

Despite all the evidence of enduring Jew-hatred, few Black leaders openly condemned it, with many taking refuge behind the formula voiced by the African American novelist James Baldwin in 1972 that “the powerless, by definition, can never be ‘racists.’” Henry Louis Gates, Jr., chair of Harvard University’s African and African American Studies Department, recognized that this “slogan . . . would all too quickly serve as a blanket amnesty for our own . . . bigotries” (Gates, 1992). Indeed, currently, “anti-racist campaigners” continue to echo the dictum “Racism equals prejudice plus power.” As a result, the writer John-Paul Pagano explains that “even drooling Jew hatred . . . can get a pass if the antisemite first registers as a victim” (2016).

With this license, Black student activists provided the platforms from which militants/nationalists regularly delivered antisemitic harangues in arenas jammed with cheering—and a few jeering—students. At the University of Maryland in 1986, Kwame Ture (formerly, Stokely Carmichael) instructed, “The only good Zionist is a dead Zionist!” When Jewish students protested, the Black Student Union responded by inviting him to speak again—for an even higher honorarium (Pollack, 2011; Norwood, 2013). In 1989, “Professor Griff,” “minister of information” of the rap group Public Enemy, claimed in an interview that Jews were responsible for “the majority of wickedness that goes on across the globe,” elaborating that Jews “have a grip on America, [and] a history of killing black men” (Altschuler & Summers, 2011). Ignoring Jewish groups’ protests, Columbia University’s Black Student Organization provided him a podium on campus, where he could extend his reach. Black students generally defended the speakers’ rants, one stating categorically, “Everything he said had a foundation in truth.” “Jewish people control all the money in the United States—that’s true, that’s not being prejudiced” (Norwood & Pollack, 2020). Having absorbed the message about the invidious

Jews, one concluded in a Black students' magazine that "Caucasian Jews" continue to "defile and trash and defecate on the rest of the world," and warned that "Caucasian Jews . . . should not expect anyone to respect or protect their humanity or even shed a tear when something catastrophic happens to them" (Pollack, 2011; Pollack, 2008).

Both on and off the campus, a number of Black political and cultural figures formulated and promoted a racialized version of antisemitism. Although American Jews had been the ethnoreligious group most engaged in the struggle to end racial discrimination, the new antisemites relentlessly portrayed Jews as Blacks' foremost foe. Turning reality on its head, they depicted Jews as bent on thwarting Blacks' advance. Whereas over the centuries antisemites accused Jews of creating capitalism and communism, the Black nationalists identified Jews as the developers of *racial* capitalism—determined to subjugate and exploit Blacks above all. Some taught that Jews had never been slaves but were the leading enslavers of Black people. Jews were victimizers, never victims—or had suffered at most four or five years. In the 14th century, Christians accused Jews of poisoning the wells across Europe, causing the Black Death; now, Black nationalists accused the Jews of poisoning the 'hood. They were responsible for all the toxins destroying Black communities—now, as then, the servants of Satan. Where Jews had earlier been portrayed as bleeding innocent Christian peasants, the new antisemites characterized them as "the bloodsuckers of the black nation" (Norwood & Pollack, 2020).

Decades before the current embrace of "intersectionality," Black political and cultural militants promoted the narrative of the commonality of the oppression of African Americans and Arabs—both colonized by White/racist Jews. Convinced by the Arab League and the Organization of Arab Students, its army on the campus, that in contrast to Israel, which discriminated against people of color, the Arab states were racially egalitarian and that supporters of Israel were "accomplices of colonialism and imperialism," they sought to forge an alliance with their brown brothers. As Stokely Carmichael exclaimed in 1968, Black people had "begun to see the evil of Zionism, and we will fight to wipe it out wherever it exists, be it in the ghetto of the United States or in the Middle East," adding that Blacks are "ready to take up arms and die if necessary to help free the Arabs of Palestine" (Pollack, 2013).

These charges and positions derived from a racial narrative increasingly adopted by large numbers of Black activists, which posited the unity of all people of color and considered inter-racial alliances highly suspect. The Arab-Israeli conflict was now viewed only through a racial lens. Drawing on hoary myths of Jews as masters

of deceit, they reconfigured Jews' support for Blacks as only an insidious means of subjugating them. In this racial worldview, only Blacks—or people of color—were victims. Black militants, nationalists, and increasingly all Black activists, focused on Jews, determined to erase—and replace—their identity as victims.

The militants' narrative reached a wide African American audience, and in 1981 a major survey found that "blacks were the least favorable [to Israel] of any major subgroup in the population"—35% were "unfavorable," and only 20% "highly favorable." Indeed, "the strongest racial differences show up on questions relating to the Palestinians as an oppressed, presumably racial minority" (Schneider, 1984). The social analyst Charles Silberman concluded that for the militants, "the Palestinians are 'the niggers of the Middle East'" (Silberman, 1979). Black students had absorbed the lesson well. In 1991, the newspaper of Morehouse College, a prestigious Black school in Atlanta, featured an editorial "What is Zionism?" "Zionism," the editors had learned, "is a well-organized and financed international conspiracy which controls the economic and political life of the United States and Europe, using this stranglehold to steal and colonize the land of Palestinian people. It utilizes terror and murder to achieve its goal" (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 1992).

### **Shaping Black Antisemitism**

Malcolm X can be identified as the founding father of contemporary Black antisemitism. Formally joining the Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1952 upon his release from prison, Malcolm X became its leading spokesperson until his stormy break with the organization in March 1964. After his assassination on February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was raised to sainthood and "his picture and philosophy abounded wherever black students gathered from Tougaloo to Harvard" (Turner, 1969).

Central to Malcolm X's message and appeal was his portrayal of Jews as the major "bloodsuckers" preying on the "so-called Negroes of America" (Norwood & Pollack, 2020). He railed again and again about all the allegedly usurious Jewish shopkeepers in Black neighborhoods who were "robbing you deaf, dumb and blind." "It's Jews that run these run-down stores that sell you bad food" (Pollack, 2011). He informed rapt audiences that Jews "control 90 percent of the businesses in every Negro community from the Atlantic to the Pacific" (Norwood & Pollack, 2020).

But Malcolm X updated the saga of the bloodthirsty Jew. Picturing Jewish merchants fleeing after dark "with another bag of money *drained* out of the ghetto," he charged that they "sap the very lifeblood of the so-called Negroes to maintain the state of Israel." "Israel," he explained, "was just another poorhouse

which is maintained by money sucked from the poor suckers in America” (Norwood & Pollack, 2020).

Malcolm X was bent on sundering Blacks’ alliance with Jews. Over and over he declaimed that Jews were not progressives—“You can find a whole lot of them who are Nazis.” He acknowledged that Jews were “among all other whites the most active . . . in the Negro civil rights movement” (Pollack, 2011). But, he proclaimed, the deceitful Jews had joined and subsidized the civil rights organizations to “control and contain the Negro’s struggle,” subverting the revolt of the “downtrodden black masses” here in “the last stronghold of white supremacy.” The Jews and the “Uncle Tom” leaders they select ignite “artificial fires” in a “desperate” attempt to thwart “the Black Revolution” that has already “swept white supremacy out of Africa, out of Asia,” and is “now manifesting itself . . . among the black masses in this country” (Norwood & Pollack, 2020).

Malcolm X also took the lead in recrafting Blacks’ perception of the Holocaust and of Jews as victims. The narrative had to focus only on the suffering of Blacks. “Why,” he instructed, “only 6 million Jews were killed by Hitler.” “Don’t let no Jew get up in your face and make you cry for him.” “One hundred million of us were kidnapped and brought to this country—100 million. Now everybody’s getting wet-eyed over a handful of Jews . . . What about our hundred million?” Besides, he explained, Jews “brought it on themselves” (Pollack, 2011).

In fact, the number of enslaved who departed from Africa over the course of the Atlantic slave trade numbered 10 million—4% of whom were brought to “the region that became the United States”—that is, about 400,000. And unlike the fate of the Jews, the enslaved population of the United States “increased rapidly by natural means” so that by 1850 it included “over 30 percent of the African New World diaspora” (Davis, 2006). Yet Malcolm X’s narrative became the gospel truth.

Malcolm X was determined not only to sunder Blacks’ alliance with Jews, but also to forge instead a strong bond between Blacks and Arabs. On his trip to Saudi Arabia in 1959, Malcolm X informed his hosts that the “millions of colored people in America” would be “in sympathy with the Arab cause” because they are “related to the Arabs by blood.” Here he had found the “homeland”—a racial paradise, just as the NOI taught—and Malcolm X exulted that he had found “no color prejudice among Muslims” (X, 1959; Pollack, 2013; Pollack, 2021). Desperate to confirm the Arab lands as the Blacks’ motherland, he managed to overlook the slave market still operating nearby. Indeed, the enslavement of Black people persisted in some Arab/Muslim lands until the end of the twentieth century. As late as 1960, “Muslims on pilgrimages to Mecca still sold slaves upon arrival,” “using them as

living travelers cheques” (Davis, 2006). He failed—or refused—to recognize the long history of “racial contempt” that prevailed in Arab/Muslim lands. The Tunisian Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), one of the foremost “social thinkers” of the Middle Ages—whose views were echoed by many Arab writers—explained that Black people were “as a whole submissive to slavery, because Negroes have little that is essentially human and have attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals”—a rationale for racial slavery heard *later* in the American South. And Arab and Persian writers “frequently associated blacks with apes” (Davis, 2006).

Above all, Malcolm X stressed the parallels between the determination of the Jews to thwart the rising of the Black masses in the US and to derail the “awakening” and development of Blacks and people of color in Africa and the Middle East. Writing from Cairo in September 1964, he elaborated a full-blown anti-Zionist ideology, whose antisemitic foundation was clear. “Zionist Israel,” he claimed, was perfecting the modern evil of “neo-colonialism,” which he labeled “Zionist-Dollarism”—the “number one weapon of twentieth-century imperialism.” “Their colonialism appears to be more ‘benevolent’” and therefore it has “fast become even more unshakeable than that of the 19th century European colonialists.” Just as the Jews had effected in the US, the “Zionist-capitalist conspiracy” was now creating “economic cripples” of the Blacks and people of color in its long reach (Pollack, 2013).

### **Black Antisemitism Enters the Political Arena**

Beginning in 1979, Black antisemitism—generally thinly garbed as anti-Zionism—entered the national political arena, where by 1988, it had been embraced—or tolerated—by most Black leaders and their supporters. No longer would they characterize Jews as fellow warriors against racial injustice; they had become racist Zionists colonizing Palestinian Arabs—fellow people of color. Jesse Jackson, an ordained Baptist minister and former lieutenant of Martin Luther King, Jr., took the lead of this movement and “at the end of the seventies [emerged] as virtually the sole national voice of the black community” (Frady, 1992b).

In mid-August 1979, when Andrew Young, US ambassador to the UN—the “highest-ranking black official in the country”—resigned under pressure, the dimensions of Black enmity toward their erstwhile Jewish allies were exposed (Friedman, 1995). Violating longstanding US policy, on July 26, Young met secretly with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) observer at the UN—and lied about it. Despite the absence of evidence, Jackson—and the majority of Black leaders—blamed Israel and American Jews for Young’s demise, and Jackson



observed that relations between Blacks and Jews were “more tense . . . than they’ve been in 25 years” (Johnston, 1979).

On August 22, at a meeting called to address the Young affair, over 200 Black leaders drew up a document, adopted unanimously, that denigrated and dismissed Jews’ long support for “black causes” (Johnson, 1979). When “traditionalist leaders” demurred, arguing that *their* organizations relied on Jews’ donations and political support, the younger leaders reminded them that Arabs now had plenty of cash. Upon leaving the gathering, the renowned psychologist Kenneth Clark characterized the meeting as “Our Declaration of Independence” (Reynolds & Maclean, 1979; Johnson, 1979).

The next month, Jackson, whose “flamboyant style . . . draws the white media to him like bees to honey,” appeared on CBS’s *60 Minutes*, where he mocked the claim that a Black–Jewish alliance had *ever* existed (Roberts, 1979). On September 23, Jackson left for the Middle East, where, he predicted, his meetings with leaders could produce “a major breakthrough” in the search for peace (“Jesse Jackson Goes to Mideast,” 1979). Many Black leaders, no longer wary lest they “alienate Jewish supporters,” were determined to dramatize their independence and power by assuming a central role on the “whole question of Israel and Middle East policy”—but Jackson, always “a show boater,” took center stage (Delaney, 1979; Roberts, 1979).

Upon landing in Tel Aviv and learning that Prime Minister Menachem Begin had declined to meet with him, Jackson denounced the rejection as “a racist decision based on skin color” (Puddington, 1984).

After emerging from Yad Vashem, Jackson announced that he now better understood “the persecution complex of many Jewish people that almost invariably makes them overreact.” “The suffering is atrocious,” he acknowledged, “but really not unique.” And in the shadow of Yad Vashem, he warned, “Genocide should not be allowed to happen to anyone, not even the Palestinians” (Lewis, 1979; Puddington, 1984). Jackson then left for Beirut, where he warmly embraced Yasser Arafat, the PLO chair, while the crowd shouted, “Palestine is Arab!” “Our revolution shall triumph!” (Friedman, 1995). Jackson then went to Cairo, where he met with Egypt’s President Anwar el-Sadat, and on to Syria, where he spoke with President Hafez al-Assad.

Determined to forge an alliance with Arabs, after returning to the US, Jackson informed them how fully he shared their view of Israel, Zionism, and the Jews. Addressing an Arab American audience in 1980, he declaimed, “We have the real

obligation to separate Zionism from Judaism. Judaism is a religion . . . Zionism is a kind of poisonous weed that is choking Judaism” (Puddington, 1984).

On November 3, 1983, Jackson announced, “Our time has come”—he was running for president. Having characterized him as “a spectacular and irrepressible virtuoso of ego,” few journalists or politicians were surprised (Frady, 1992a). Before long, however, the editor of the *New Republic* concluded that “with the candidacy of Jesse Jackson, black antisemitism gained a big-time tribune” (Editor, 1984).

In January 1984, in an interview with two Black reporters, Jackson’s antisemitism exploded. After condemning the US policy “that ‘excites one nation’—Israel—and ‘incites 23 others’—the Arab world,” Jackson complained, in effect, “That’s all Hymie wants to talk about is Israel; every time you go to Hymietown, that’s all they want to talk about” (Coleman, 1984). On February 13, Jackson’s slur finally appeared, buried deep in an article in the *Washington Post*, where it elicited little attention. But on February 18, the *Washington Post* issued a scorching editorial calling on Jackson to explain his “degrading and disgusting” words. Notably, a number of other journalists heard Jackson use the slur but had not reported it. A CBS correspondent maintained that had another candidate made the comment, “it would have *immediately* been front-page news.” But “largely white news organizations have been ‘timid—they don’t want to look bigoted’” (Mayer, 1984).

For almost two weeks after the *Washington Post* recounted his remarks, Jackson repeatedly and unequivocally denied he had made them. Finally admitting—after a fashion—that he had made the comments, he dismissed the slur as “innocent and unintentional.” During the controversy, Jackson’s staff denied there was reason for concern because he “never expected to get many Jewish votes anyway”—as if only Jews would be appalled by his bigotry (Newfield, 1984).

The controversies surrounding the campaign were soon exacerbated by threats leveled by Louis Farrakhan, head of the NOI since 1977, who attributed Jackson’s woes only to “the Jews.” On March 25, 1984, he warned: “I say to the Jewish people . . . if you harm this brother, I warn you in the name of Allah, this will be the last one you harm.” Farrakhan also threatened the interviewer who revealed Jackson’s slur: “You are a nigger in the eyes of white people . . . One day soon we will punish you with death” [crowd screams approval] (Reelblack, 2019). When asked to respond, Jackson shrugged, “I have no ability to muzzle surrogates who want to make a contribution” (Safire, 1984).

Fearful of alienating Blacks, who had been registering and voting “in unprecedented numbers to support [Jackson’s] cause,” the other Democratic



presidential candidates' criticism was restrained (Herbers, 1984). The columnist George Will observed, "Jackson's improvised reckless rhetoric would destroy any other candidate in a week" (Mayer, 1984). Although Jackson eventually distanced himself from Farrakhan, he never repudiated him—he had, after all, stated earlier, "I respect him very much" (Will, 1984).

On July 9, in a bitter interview assessing his "odyssey," Jackson castigated the Jews, above all, for his difficulties. He singled out "the struggle by Jewish leaders to make me a pariah and . . . to separate me from the masses" (Skelton, 1984). To be sure, a significant number of Jewish leaders—and Jews—had concluded that Jackson was antisemitic. Nathan Perlmutter, head of the ADL, declared, "Let me say it plainly . . . [His] statements . . . render the self-portrait of an anti-Semite" (Goldman, 1984). Yet at the Democratic National Convention, from July 16–19, Jackson was "widely hailed" "in the black community . . . as King's manifest successor." He had amassed 21% of the vote in the primaries and caucuses—but captured only 4% of the white vote (Frady, 1992b).

In 1988, Jackson again "ran hard" for the Democratic nomination for president. Unlike in 1984, when a number of traditional Black leaders withheld their support, this time virtually all the "leading voices in the black community" were actively on board (Friedman, 1995). Andrew Young, then mayor of Atlanta (1982–1990), wrote to Jackson: "You make me feel proud and humble when I hear you speak . . . You have my full endorsement as the moral voice of our time" (Frady, 1992b). For Young, an antisemite was "the moral voice of our time."

This time, Jackson received 12% of the White vote, while his Black vote reached "astronomical levels" (NBC News, 1988). Political analysts warned that the danger of political antisemitism lay not so much in "the level of antisemitic beliefs" as in the level of tolerance for the age-old poison (Raab, 1969; Lipset, 1990).

### **Antisemitism: The Foundation Stone of the Nation of Islam**

On June 24, 1984, after assuring listeners to his radio address, "I'm not anti-Jew. I'm pro-truth," Louis Farrakhan, head of the NOI (1977–present), screamed that Israel "will never have any peace because there can be no peace structured on injustice, lying and deceit, and using the name of God to shield your dirty religion under His holy and righteous name." He declaimed, "The presence of a state called Israel is an outlaw act," and if you "aid and abet someone in a criminal conspiracy, you are a part of that criminal conspiracy. So America, England and the nations are criminals in the sight of Almighty God" (UPI, 1984; Pollack, 2021).

Stunned by his characterization of Judaism as “a dirty religion” and the creation of Israel as “an outlaw act,” on June 28, the US Senate voted 95–0 for a resolution that “condemned” “hateful, bigoted expressions of anti-Jewish and racist sentiments such as those being made by Louis Farrakhan” (Lawsky, 1984). Responding to the resolution, Farrakhan challenged his interviewer on CNN, “Go out on the streets and talk to the little man . . . about the Senate’s repudiation of Louis Farrakhan. They love Farrakhan and they will love me more the more you fight against me” (Muhammad, 2016; Pollack, 2021).

Indeed, Farrakhan had wide support in the black community. In 1985, massive crowds of African Americans—of all social classes, both Christian and Muslim—turned out to cheer him. In Washington, DC, 10,000 heard him rail against “the Jews;” in Los Angeles, the crowd was estimated at 14,000; and in New York, 20,000 responded to each antisemitic charge by “rising to its feet, . . . arms outstretched at 45 degree angles, fists clenched” (Lester, 1985).

From its beginnings in the 1930s, the delegitimization of Judaism—and the denigration of “white Jews”—have formed the core of the NOI belief system. The founder of the NOI, W. D. [Fard] Muhammad, who revealed himself as “God in person”—the Mahdi—instructed Elijah Muhammad, his Messenger, in the fundamentals of the racial theology to which the Nation has always adhered. Fard taught that 6,000 years ago, the “evil big-headed scientist” Yacub “grafted” “the white race . . . out of the black nation,” creating a race of devils (Muhammad, 1957; Pollack, 2021).

Central to the creation narrative, however, were the nefarious “white Jews,” “the Draftsmen and the Architects” of white supremacy—which “has dominated our planet for the last 4,000 years” (Farrakhan, 2011; Pollack, 2021). Elijah learned that “from the first day [the white Jews] received the Divine Scriptures”—soon after they emerged “naked [from] the caves and hillsides of Europe”—“they started tampering with its truth,” “converting the Bible into the graveyard of my poor people, the so-called Negroes” (Pollack, 2021). Guided by Fard, Elijah had racialized the basic Qur’anic precept that upon receiving the Torah, “a party from among the Jews . . . heard it, understood it, then [intentionally] altered it” (Pollack, 2021). The white Jews had contrived a counterfeit text, crafting a new deity who blessed their Satanic mission, above all, “to master” the Black Nation—and ultimately, “their own white brethren” as well (Pollack, 2020). Elijah taught Farrakhan that Jacob, the “master deceiver,” progenitor of the white Jews, had replaced God with Satan, whom the “imposter Jews” were destined to serve for the next 4,000 years—hence, the “dirty religion” (Pollack, 2021).

In fashioning the corrupted Torah, the “so-called Jews” had usurped African Americans’ position as “the real chosen people of God” (Norwood & Pollack, 2020). “Almighty God Allah revealed that the Black People of America are the Real Children of Israel . . . and . . . unto us He will deliver His Promise.” The Jews in the Middle East are only “the False Israel” (Farrakhan, 2011; Pollack, 2013). Addressing Israel’s prime minister, in 2017 Farrakhan warned: “To Israel, Bibi [Netanyahu]: . . . Your desire is to conquer that whole area lying, saying that ‘Abraham promised you.’ He ain’t promised you a damn thing!” (ADL, 2018).

When Farrakhan announced that “the presence of a state called Israel is an outlaw act,” he was merely voicing long-held NOI doctrine. As was his characterization of “America [and] England . . . [as] criminals in the sight of Almighty God.” Fard had foretold that Allah’s annihilation of the white devils in a lake of fire would begin with the destruction of England in retribution for the Balfour Declaration, which promised Palestine to the “false Jews.” After the establishment of Israel, Elijah updated the narrative, thrusting the US into the initial path of destruction of the fiery storm (Pollack, 2013; Pollack, 2021).

As NOI theology held that the Hebrew Bible was largely prophecy about the Black Nation, it was Blacks—not Jews—who had been enslaved for 400 years. For the NOI, the imposter Jews had not been enslaved—they were enslavers—of the Black Nation. Anonymously authored by the Historical Research Department of the Nation of Islam, in 1991 the NOI published *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews*, which attributed “monumental culpability” for the Atlantic slave trade to the Jews—a “monumental lie” (Axelrod, 1995). Scholars have shown that Jews had only a “very marginal place” in the slave trade (Davis, 1994). Still, NOI members crisscrossed the country, hawking the tract and preaching its message. In 2019, Farrakhan continued to rail that “members of the so-called Jewish community brought our fathers out of Africa, owned the ships, owned the plantations, were the Number 1 buyers of slaves!” (Pollack, 2021).

The extent of Farrakhan’s appeal became clear on October 16, 1995 when around 600,000 African American men responded to his call to come to Washington, DC for a Million Man March. The day-long event culminated in what some dubbed his two-hour coronation address. Although Farrakhan has wide support on the Black street, those who filled the Mall were largely “middle-class and college-educated and Christian” (Gates, 1996).

In 2005, black political leaders again elevated Farrakhan’s status by inviting him to participate in the Congressional Black Caucus’s legislative weekend, “the Super

Bowl of black politics and activism” (Davis, 2005), where Farrakhan “met privately” with then-Senator Obama.

Several co-chairs of the Women’s March—organized to demonstrate opposition to the presidency of Donald Trump—had ties to Farrakhan and endorsed his antisemitic message. In 2016 and early 2017, women of color co-chairs informed Jewish organizers that “You people [or “your people”] hold all the wealth,” and “Jewish people bore a special collective responsibility as exploiters of black and brown people” (McSweeney & Siegel, 2018; Pollack, 2019). Tamika Mallory, one of the co-chairs, later clarified that their remarks only referred to “white Jews.” In 2018, Mallory attended the NOI’s annual commemoration of “Saviour’s Day,” honoring Fard’s birth, where Farrakhan denounced “Satanic Jews” and promised “Satan is going down” (Pagano, 2018). Mallory then praised Farrakhan as the “GOAT”—“Greatest of All Time” (Page, 2018; Pollack, 2021).

### **The Black Lives Matter Movement: When Narrative Replaces Reality**

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged in 2013, but gained renown in 2014 with the massive protests fueled by the police killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man, in Ferguson, Missouri. At the core of the movement was the leaders’ and activists’ insistence upon the parallel experiences of African Americans, routinely menaced by racist police, and their brown brothers in “Palestine,” endlessly terrorized by racist Zionist “occupation” forces.

Although the movement has generally leveled its charges at “Zionists,” frequently antisemitism appears undisguised. Updating the centuries-old blood libel, BLM marchers chanted, “Israel, we know you kill children too!” and signs proclaimed, “Defend Gaza: the New Warsaw Ghetto”—the Jews cast as the Nazis annihilating innocent people of color (Lapkin, 2020; Torok, 2021). Addressing a conference on Human Rights in 2015, Patrisse Cullors, one of the three co-founders of the movement, characterized the Palestinian cause as “our generation’s South Africa” and urged the audience to “step up boldly and courageously to end the imperialist project that’s called Israel,” concluding that “we’re doomed” if Israel is not brought to an “end” (Chamberlain, 2021). As Natan Sharansky, the eminent human rights activist, explained, “The denial of Israel’s right to exist is always antisemitic” (2005). Manfred Gerstenfeld, longtime analyst of Judeophobia, warned, “BLM is a racist movement . . . [which] intends nothing good for Jews or Israel, no matter how many Jews proclaim their allegiance to it” (2020).

Declaring their union with their Palestinian brothers in the struggle against the Zionist outpost of white racism, BLM leaders and activists disregard the system of racial hierarchy that has prevailed in Arab lands for centuries, where light skin is

highly desired and a “source of prestige” (Perry, c. 2002). The Black Palestinian actress Maryam Abu Khaled painfully recounts how Palestinian parents warn their children not to “get sunburned”—lest they come to “look like Maryam.” Arabs’ racism, she stresses, is never “harmless” (Shehab & Baird, 2020). The social media platforms of a number of Palestinian American activists in the BLM movement are jammed with anti-Black messages. Along with his calls to “hate the notion of Israel” and deny its “right to exist,” and “Barack Obama . . . go kill all the Jews,” Samer Alhato, a Palestinian American invited to address a Chicago BLM rally, had questioned if Blacks “actually have working brain cells,” and tweeted: “If a black person has an iphone chances are it’s stolen.” The messages of Palestinian American BLM allies are also laced with references to Blacks as *abeed*—slaves (Shehab & Baird, 2020; CanaryMission.org). African American leaders and activists manage to overlook the anti-Black biases of their allies—overridden by their shared anti-Zionist/anti-Israel commitments and conviction that people of color cannot be racist.

### **Bringing the BLM Movement to “Palestine”**

Founded in 2012, and led by Ahmad Abuznaid, a Palestinian American, the organization Dream Defenders established a program to bring delegations of African American activists to “Palestine,” where they could “see first-hand the occupation, ethnic cleansing and brutality Israel has levied against Palestinians, but also . . . build real relationships with those . . . leading the fight for liberation” (Ebony, 2015). Thus the delegates on the May 2016 trip met with Omar Barghouti, founder of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement, and their tour guide was affiliated with the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) (Kampeas, 2016). Patrisse Cullors, co-organizer of the first excursion in January 2015, summarized the message she would bring home: “This is an apartheid state. We can’t deny that and if we do deny it we are a part of the Zionist violence” (Ebony, 2015).

In Nazareth, Cullors organized a flash mob, choreographed as a video to play on US campuses. Titled “When I See Them, I See Us,” the video stressed African Americans’ and Palestinians’ common encounters with oppression: “When I see them, I see us, harassed, beaten, tortured, dehumanized, stopped and frisked, searched at checkpoints, administrative detention, youth incarceration.” And then, the dead speak: “They burned me alive in Jerusalem. They gunned me down in Chicago. They shot our water tanks in Hebron. They cut off our water in Detroit. They demolished our homes in the *naqba*. They swallowed our homes in New Orleans” (Street Art United States, 2015).

Growing out of the Dream Defenders trip and the participation of Palestinian Americans in BLM protests, in summer 2015 Black for Palestine (B4P) issued the “Black Solidarity Statement with Palestine.” Signed by over 1,000 Black organizations and activists, including BLM chapter heads, it characterized Operation Protective Edge as “a one-sided slaughter” and “reject[ed] Israel’s framing of itself as a victim.” Hamas was only responding to “Israeli settler colonialism and apartheid, an apparatus built and sustained on ethnic cleansing, land theft, and the denial of Palestinian humanity and sovereignty”—and they “called on the US government to end economic and diplomatic aid to Israel” (Black for Palestine, 2015).

### **Forging a Black/Palestinian Anti-Israel Alliance**

It was in the wake of the events of August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, when a White policeman killed Michael Brown, that the Black–Palestinian alliance solidified. To the African American academic Robin D.G. Kelley, “the Gaza-Ferguson nexus” not only “linked Israeli apartheid to anti-Black racism,” but happily “signaled the demise of the U.S. ‘Black-Jewish alliance’” (Kelley, 2021). In fact, Black leaders had buried the alliance in 1979, and few Blacks—as opposed to many Jews—had mourned its passing.

Palestinians tweeted their support for the protestors in Ferguson: “The Tear Gas used against you was probably tested on us first by Israel . . . Stay Strong. Love, #Palestine” (Isaacs, 2016). Large numbers of Palestinian Americans converged on Ferguson to join the protests. Bassem Masri, a Palestinian American, became “perhaps Ferguson’s most famous live-streamer” (Kang, 2015). Upon being arrested, his tweet about the police—“Pigs in a blanket, fry ‘em like baconnnn #Ferguson”—became the protestors’ chant (Khaled, 2021). Masri later recounted, “When the checkpoints went up and the tanks came in and the tear gas flew, I ain’t seen no difference from Palestine” (Khalek, 2014).

Many BLM leaders and activists, including Palestinian American allies, held Israel—and its Zionist advocates in the US—directly responsible for the police killings of Blacks. It was training programs in Israel, they charged, that instructed US police forces in the brutal methods they deployed in African American communities. Many with direct knowledge of the training, by contrast, explained—again and again—that the charges were baseless. An Israeli police representative underscored the disconnect: “The Americans are much better at dealing with crime than we are . . . In this field, we have a lot to learn from them, not them from us. When US police officers come to Israel, we teach them how to deal with



terrorist attacks, which has nothing to do with killing American civilians” (Leibovitz-Dar, 2016).

Still, in 2017, the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) released a 57-page report on the “Deadly Exchange.” The report divulged that “Israeli ‘inter-agency coordination’ is advertised for US delegates as one of the most important attributes of successful prevention of and response to terror, and is extensively covered in all trainings.” JVP presumed that “inter-agency coordination” was a new concept, which only a fascist state could have introduced. “Deadly Exchange” also uncovered that delegations had been taken on “a tour of Ben Gurion airport.” This, too, was ominous, because “the core of Israel’s airport security is systematic racial profiling . . . directly derived from its Apartheid legal and policing systems.” Just as activists suspected, JVP concluded that Israel was responsible for racial profiling in the US (JVP, 2017).

On May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, when a police officer asphyxiated George Floyd, an unarmed African American, by kneeling on his neck, the claim that he or his department had been taught the maneuver in Israel went viral. Although no link ever emerged, the libel endured.

### **Reading—or Denying—the Handwriting on the Wall**

The handwriting was clearly on the wall. Yet many national Jewish organizations chose to ignore the signs—until August 1, 2016, when the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) posted the policy platform “A Vision for Black Lives.”

The BLM website identified M4BL as one of its four (sometimes, five) “partners”—apparently “divided for fundraising purposes”—and provided a direct link to the M4BL platform. (Hollander, 2020; BLM, 2016). The “Invest/Divest” section of the platform stated that because of its alliance with Israel, “the US . . . is complicit in the genocide taking place against the Palestinian people.” It claimed that “Israel is an apartheid state with over 50 laws on the books that sanction discrimination against the Palestinian people” and condemned “the US-funded apartheid wall.” In a variant of the blood libel, the platform charged that Israeli soldiers “regularly arrest and detain Palestinians as young as 4 years old.” The platform called on activists to “build invest/divestment campaigns that ends [sic] US Aid to Israel’s military industrial complex” and provided a link to the BDS movement website (M4BL, 2020).

To Alan Dershowitz, Harvard Law professor emeritus, “the platform is the closest thing to a formal declaration of principles by BLM” (2016). By contrast, national Jewish organizations minimized the platform’s significance. Jonathan Greenblatt,

executive director of the ADL since July 2015, condemned the claims of the Invest/Divest section, but insisted that it was only “some individuals and organizations associated with the Black Lives Matter movement [that] have engaged in antisemitic rhetoric” (Hollander, 2020). The Jewish Council for Public Affairs [JCPA] also tried to isolate M4BL, stressing that its views should not be seen as “the consensus position of the entire movement. The Black Lives Matter movement is diffuse and diverse” (JCPA, [n.d.]).

Dershowitz, by contrast, refused to minimize the import of the platform: “To falsely accuse Israel of ‘genocide,’ the worst crime of all, . . . is antisemitic. Until and unless BLM removes this blood libel from its platform and renounces it, no decent person . . . should have anything to do with it” (Dershowitz, 2016). To Isi Leibler, a leader of the movement to liberate Soviet Jews, it was “unconscionable” that “any mainstream Jewish organization [would] continue providing legitimacy” to the BLM movement “on the grounds that only ‘a small minority of leaders’ are responsible. [But] for an organization like the ADL, whose principal mandate is to combat antisemitism, it is sheer lunacy” (Leibler, 2016).

Although these organizations continue to insist that the BLM movement should not be identified with the M4BL platform, much evidence contradicts their claim. Ricki Hollander, senior analyst at CAMERA, who carefully traced the organizational interconnections within the movement, concluded that “it is not only a few individual activists or protestors who espouse antisemitic views. Rather, there is a top-down strategy of incorporating anti-Zionist activism into the movement” (Hollander, 2020). Moreover, prospective chapters must undergo “a rigorous assessment” and “commit to the organization’s [thirteen] guiding principles” before being admitted to the BLM network (Cobb, 2016). That is, it is not the “diffuse and diverse” organization that some portrayed.

One scholar suggested that Jews should “point out BLM’s moral blind spot” to activists (Rosenblatt, 2016). But, as Jonathan Tobin, editor-in-chief of Jewish News Syndicate, explains, the platform’s condemnation of “Israel as an ‘apartheid state’ [is] a lie that is integral to the intersectional ideology at the core of the BLM mindset” (Tobin, 2020c)—not a “blind spot.”

The paradigm that guides leading BLM activists positions the Jewish state and Zionism at the epicenter of racial oppression—with Israelis classed as ‘Whites’ in the current lexicon. This is part of the tendency of Black militants/nationalists—dating at least since Malcolm X, whom BLM activists revere—to recast Jews as victimizers—even the worst of the victimizers—no longer, or never, victims. The Holocaust is replaced by the “Black Holocaust.” For BLM leaders and activists, Only

White Racism Matters. Melina Abdullah, co-founder of the Los Angeles chapter of BLM, stated, “You can’t be on the front lines for the struggle for freedom for one group of people, and then be silent on everyone else’s” (Sullivan & Wootson, 2021). In practice, however, BLM has focused only on “the struggle for freedom” of Palestinian people of color from the “racist” Jewish state.

On August 28, 2020, M4BL updated its policy platform, which, to the relief of some Jewish organizations, seemingly did not mention Israel. However, as Hollander quickly pointed out, the introduction states, “This document does not represent the entirety of our Vision”—at this time it includes an “expanded version” of only one of the six planks. And, notably, in 2020—and in 2022—the original platform—its antisemitic/anti-Israel charges intact—remains readily accessible on the M4BL website (Hollander, 2020; M4BL, 2020).

On August 28, 2020—the day chosen to “coincide with the 57th anniversary of [Martin Luther King’s] 1963 March on Washington”—a full-page ad appeared in the *New York Times*, consisting of a letter entitled “We Speak with One Voice when We Say, Unequivocally: BLACK LIVES MATTER.” Organized by Bend the Arc, which identifies as “the only national Jewish organization focused exclusively on progressive social change in the United States,” the letter was signed by more than 600 Jewish groups—allegedly “representing over half of Jewish people in the U.S.” (Stancil, 2020). The signatories endorsed the BLM movement as “the current day Civil Rights movement in this country” (“Jewish Organizations Say,” 2020).

The letter addresses antisemitism, but only to identify it as a sword wielded by “politicians and political movements in this country who build power by deliberately manufacturing fear to divide us against each other” (“Jewish Organizations Say,” 2020). In short, according to the letter, accusations of antisemitism within the BLM movement are without foundation. That the signatories “seek[ ] to link opposition to the movement to antisemitism,” Tobin observes, “isn’t just wrong. It’s outrageous since intersectional radicals who form the shock troops of the BLM movement . . . are themselves guilty of antisemitism” (2020c).

Many who signed the letter present their support for the BLM movement as an expression of their commitment to *tikkun olam*—repairing the world—or to “social justice,” which is, as Tobin observes, not just at the core of “their political views,” but represents “their conception of Judaism” and “their American Jewish identity” (2020b). Thus the Jewish Council for Public Affairs continues to insist that “experience has shown that we can have a far greater impact in deterring antisemitism if we are in relationship with leaders and organizations” (JCPA, [n.d.]).

But, as Tobin concludes, “anyone expecting BLM ideologues to join the fight against antisemitism, let alone BDS, isn’t paying attention” (2020b). Or, as Manfred Gerstenfeld lamented, for the signatories of the letter, “repairing the world entails embracing antisemites, being Jewish masochists, . . . and foregoing Jewish dignity” (2020).

## **Conclusion**

Although today anyone suspected of harboring racist views is designated a pariah, even overt, “egregious” expressions of antisemitism do not elicit “the same moral opprobrium” (Tobin, 2020a). This is even more true if the antisemite is African American. The columnist Richard Cohen’s 1984 lament—that “few know how to deal with black racism—a double standard of sorts [exists]”—remains valid (Cohen, 1984). Compounding the problem is the tendency of Black academic, political and cultural figures to run interference for the offenders. Derrick Bell, the first Black professor at Harvard Law School, defended Blacks who celebrated Farrakhan, warning that “even those who strongly disagree with *some* of his positions must ask whether the negatives justify total condemnation” (Muravchik, 1995). In 2005, when Farrakhan was organizing the Millions More March, Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, challenged Black leaders to disavow an event whose conveners “taint the proceedings with the baggage of anti-Semitism and hate.” In response, Russell Simmons, the hip-hop mogul—and chair of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding—denounced Foxman: “Simply put, you are misguided, arrogant and very disrespectful of African Americans”—and unloosed an antisemitic charge of his own: “When you keep demonizing Farrakhan in front of the Jewish community . . . that might be another way to raise money” (Anderson, 2005).

In 2019, it was the Congressional Black Caucus that interceded on behalf of Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Caucus member, blocking her censure and objecting to a resolution that would have condemned what Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyoming) characterized as her “vile, hate-filled, antisemitic, anti-Israel bigotry.” Among other comments, Omar had famously tweeted that Congress’s support for Israel was “all about the Benjamins, baby”—that is, Jewish money bought their votes. Instead, Congress approved an all-inclusive resolution that denounced “antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and other forms of bigotry.” Elated, Omar celebrated it as a “historic” victory for Muslims (Nelson, 2019; Davis, 2019). Deflecting attention from Black antisemitism, Congress had also erased the uniqueness of the world’s oldest and longest hatred.

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