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21 May 1991.



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Betty

JEWISH-ETHNIC DIALOGUE -- A RENEWED CYCLE

By Marc H. Tanenbaum

--NEW YORK

A considerable amount of attention is being devoted in the nation's major media to demographic changes in American society occasioned by the rise of Asian, Hispanic, and Blacks in many of our large cities. B

While charges of undercounting persist, ⁱⁿ the recent 1990 census the population changes in New York City alone is telling. There has been a half-million drop in the city's white population since 1980, coupled with a doubling of Asian-Americans and a 30- percent increase in Hispanics. Blacks made up 28.7 of New York's population in 1990, up from 25 percent in ~~1980~~ 1980.

"Every New Yorker is now a minority," wrote one commentator.

~~Some~~ These trends seem to be presented to the white and Jewish population with some anxiety, as if these demographic shifts are a clap on thunder out of the blue.

In point of fact, students of American demography and ethnic groups began to recognize this changing pattern as early as the 1970s. All of the major Jewish intergroup agencies began two decades ago developing strategies for relating to Asian, Hispanic, black, and Native American groups.

Most of the Jewish community relations groups around the country undertook during the past two decades ~~developing~~ relationships with leaders and key players in each of these ethnic groups in their communities. ^{cultivating}

The crucial issue, I believe, is not whether Jewish agencies both nationally and locally are alert and responsive to these important religious, racial, and ethnic changes. I think by and large the evidence is that they know what is going on in these population shifts and are generally being creative in their search for common ground.

The critical question is how Jewish agencies will define their relationships with the ascendant ethnic bodies.

For a period of time, some theoreticians and practitioners in the Jewish community appeared to support ethnic assertion in unconditional terms. Such ethnic assertion quickly become ethnic aggression demanding entitlements from the society but owing it few duties.

Dr. Martin Marty, a leading Protestant scholar, wrote some years ago that the dynamic of American pluralism involves a tension between "identity and exposure." Each group has a right and a duty to define its identity in its own terms. But if it cares only for itself, America will become Balkanized into rival camps.

^{an} There is an obligation, Dr. Marty added, that once identity is realized, each religious, racial and ethnic group has obligation to expose it values and culture for the benefit of the general society.

It is such a conception of the duties and responsibilities to one's own group and to the general welfare that should become the basis of the new cycle of ethnic relationships in our changing nation.