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Box 78, Folder 10, American Jewish Committee staff meeting -  
Black-Jewish relations, 1979.

M. Tannenbaum

CONFIDENTIAL

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE  
MINUTES - SEPTEMBER 4, 1979 STAFF MEETING ON BLACK-JEWISH RELATIONS

Present: S.Samet, S.Rabinové, B.Gold, H.Lazere, A.Karlikow, I.Levine, M. Yarmon, N. Podhoretz, W.Katz, M.Braveman, P.Sherman, E.DuBow, H. Bookbinder, H. Applebaum, M. Ellerin, S. Kaufer, H. Fleischman, I. Silverman.

Samet - Meeting is part of a process. It's being held in preparation for the September 13 luncheon meeting on this issue for AJC officers and DAC committee chairmen; then the DAC meeting the same day. A report of the meetings will then go to the Board of Governors meeting September 18, the staff cabinet September 25, and possibly the NEC in San Francisco October 26.

The purpose of the meeting is: 1) communication; 2) to discuss what strategy and 3) what tactics we should employ in light of the current black-Jewish disarray. What has led up to it?

1. In the 1960's, the Black Power movement started with blacks in SNCC and CORE ousting whites from their groups; ghetto riots occurred with the slogan, "Burn, Baby, Burn"; Jews were turned off both by the violence and the rejection.

2. New government regulations, poverty programs to increase community control, led to increased conflict. Northern school desegregation hit home to Jews, exacerbated by black groups calling for massive busing. The New York teachers' strike fanned flames of both black anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-black racism.

3. Ethnic self-identification became more popular. As blacks turned inward, so did Jews, particularly as the problems of Israel and Soviet Jewry became dominant. We also faced a changing urban demography.

4. The conflict over quotas, which many blacks equated with affirmative action, became heated over the De Funis, Bakke, Weber and now the Fullilove cases.

Gold - After 200 blacks met, we had a debriefing by Bayard Rustin (off the record) for Gold, Perlmutter ADL, Siegman AJCongress, Muravchik JLC, Chernin NJCRAC, Fleischman, of what actually took place. Both Rustin and Vernon Jordan felt that a strong Jewish statement would be useful to counteract the impression that anti-Jewish blacks could ride roughshod over us and would help moderate blacks in efforts to rebuild black-Jewish coalition. We prepared and issued strong statement through NJCRAC.

Vernon Jordan has suggested that he and I convene an off-the-record meeting of a small group of black and Jewish leaders - about 8 on each side within next few weeks. Jordan will raise problems from black side. Jews will do likewise from their side. Attempts will be made to isolate issues where there is strong disagreement, as well as gray areas. Then we will work out areas of strong agreement. The question of emerging with a joint declaration has not yet been decided.

1. This situation today differs markedly from the late 1960's, when SNCC came out with violent anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. For one thing, major black leaders then opposed SNCC and spoke out against them. Today the major black leaders are viewed as part of the operation.

2. New Yorkers are heavily involved in the current situation. Black ministers such as Daughtry, Bill Jones (who was also active in the Teachers' strike in 1968), Tim Mitchell are stirring the pot. Percy Sutton, angered at his mayoral defeat, blames the Jews.

3. There's a new kind of Marxist influence, as exemplified by the Dreifuss article in the Village Voice. Mike Meyers of NAACP in Sunday News article is also bitter.

Questions we have to consider are:

1. Is the current turmoil just a spillover from quotas, busing, integration conflicts or is it something more fundamental?

2. If the former, will blacks use the PLO issue for domestic negotiations? If not, what does it mean?

3. Is a new black-Jewish coalition possible? Is it desirable?

4. If it is desirable, what steps should we take? If not, what strategy should we have? What will be the fallout? How should we deal with Hispanics and other groups?

5. Where is the Jewish community today in these issues?

Bookbinder - Leery of black-Jewish summit meeting. Doubts that it can be kept off-the-record.

Ben Hooks sent telegram to NAACP board members, including Joe Rauh, for NAACP board meeting September 10. Until then, Hooks suggested NAACPers limit meetings with Jews to domestic issues, like affirmative action.

Bookie meeting with Randall Robinson of Trans Africa.

Bookie and Max Kampelman met with Eisenstat, Lipshutz and Sanders to urge Carter to a) clarify that Young's dismissal was not due to Jewish pressure, b) reaffirm basic US policy on PLO, c) issue "motherhood"

statement on black-Jewish relations. Carter, at Emory University in Atlanta, only did the latter. Bad show.

Congressman Sid Yates of Chicago had a private session with Congressman Lou Stokes of Cleveland. Yates opposes having a joint meeting of the black and Jewish congressional caucuses.

Lazere - Lt. Governor Mario Cuomo disappointed with Carter speech. Worried because Christians have been quiet. Wants to get them to come out with pro-Israel statements. Horace Morris, NY Urban League, made good statements and is anxious to talk to Jewish groups.

Applebaum - Black congressman in Houston asked to meet with Jewish leaders there. Black NAACP, Urban League leaders in Pittsburgh joined with Jews in joint press conference in support of coalition. New Jersey, at request of black leader Gus Hemingburg, seeking joint black-Jewish statement.

Ellerin - Arabs are trying to move in rapidly. Jabara, Detroit Arab, is trying to set up new Black-Arab organization.

Samet - The executive committee of the National Council of Churches is meeting September 7 to consider a statement justifying talks with PLO.

Bookie - Was on TV show with Walter Fauntroy. Latter refused to disassociate himself from Jesse Jackson's explicit anti-Semitism.

Lazere - Separate New York City from the rest of the country. Black anti-Semitism in New York City very strong.

Karlikow - The main thing is that blacks felt Jews shot "their man" down.

Levine - Black establishment acquiesced to black fringe groups re Jews. Let's let conflict be open. Second thoughts are beginning to roll around. The black leadership is willing to trade on black anti-Semitism.

Applebaum - Take a sober, objective look at black-Jewish primary agendas. Juxtapose NAACP-AJC priorities and see what emerges.

Kaufer - Blacks feel failure on the domestic scene, and an attack on foreign policy gives them a macho feeling (like developing countries feel "they need their own airlines"). Arabs may well see this as a way of using the blacks to shift US foreign policy. Nevertheless, we can't afford to write blacks off, else Jews will be too isolated.

Fleischman - Black and Jewish votes, even in recent past, still very close together, and we remain strong components of the liberal movement. We still need black support on our issues, and we must work out ways to keep as large a segment of the black community working with us as possible.

Bookie - For a couple of years, pro-Palestinian sentiment has been creeping up in black ranks. Since the Andy Young firing, there has been a quantum jump in black pro-PLO sentiment. What's more, while the press editorializes against Young, they also want talks with PLO. I believe white America feels here is another illustration of "damned Jews dictating American foreign policy."

Samet - We have at least four strategy alternatives: 1) Attack black community; 2) Look for moderate blacks to with with; 3) Forget the blacks, seek new allies; 4) Business as usual.

DuBow - Our members and the Jewish community want us to show a strong anti-anti-Semitism profile. We have to be perceived as doing something. How do we handle Jesse Jackson et al?

Braveman - We must isolate anti-Semites.

Podhoretz - 1. We've reached a major turning point in politics of America. This event takes its place with the 1968 teachers' strike when race became a front for political anti-Semitism. That was acquiesced to by the white leadership, and Jews reacted with fear.

2. During the Yom Kippur War, Jews discovered you couldn't call for more military aid to Israel while calling for defense budget cuts.

3. PLO, in its demands on Israel, makes malignant sense. It is a point of view maturing in the black community. Its domestic counterpart is quotas.

4. Both represent approval of a Marxist view re "the haves and have nots" and call for redistribution by a system of reparations.

5. There is a great possibility of Arab and foundation money going for pro-PLO work.

This is enormously threatening to Jews. We cannot ally with such forces. We can't split the black community except for a few isolated individuals.

Samet - We mustn't forget that for most blacks and whites, they couldn't care less. They're concerned about bread and butter matters and are apathetic about this issue.

Karlikow - Andy Young was right when he told Blum that Blum's disclosure of Young's talks would make the PLO more important in U.S. public life.

Bookie - Had best-attended advisory panel meeting in years, including Glickstein, Rauh, Bill Taylor. They all expressed contempt for the blacks who had anti-Semitic positions, but wanted to talk about what should Israel and Jews do about the PLO.

Levine - We can split the black community. The domestic agenda is most important to blacks. Politically Jews are still closest to blacks. We should ask blacks if they want to push Jews rightwards.

DuBow - Go to members to find out what they think.

Yarmon - Spoke to Palm Beach liberal WASP editor of the Palm Beach paper. He said, "Moshe Dayan meets with the PLO. Why are American Jews so adamant?" Mort feels we should talk more about Palestinians, not PLO.

Applebaum - Black newspapers indicate that the PLO issue is secondary. Mostly, it's a signal that blacks want to be equal in discussions with Jews and other whites. We need to redefine the basic approach of black-Jewish relationships.

Katz - Jews are perceived by blacks as part of the white establishment. Our talk of anti-Semitism comes across to them as arrogance and hypocrisy.

Gold - When we talked with Vernon Jordan, Ben Hooks and Bayard Rustin, Vernon said, "You're the guys with power." That myth dies hard. Yet they want Jewish political support.

Levine - Should restore amity because acting out behavior on both sides may accelerate.

Podhoretz - The meeting of the 200 blacks was a declaration of war against Jews.

Gold - It was not. They didn't endorse SCLC statement - a defeat for Lowery. They did indicate that both blacks and Jews act out of their own self-interests and look for joint interests.

Bookie - Afraid of "summit meeting" concept. No way to keep it quiet and off the record. If you have it, keep it to a census of issues.

Levine - Could be statements against demagoguery and hostility. That would be helpful.

Lazere - Anger in both communities could break out in mixed communities; such a meeting could agree to guard against it.

Karlikow - Are there no benefits to maintaining coalition?

Gold - May want cosmetic ties and ad hoc coalitions on issues. Realistically, if this is a real watershed period, we must decide where our interests lie.

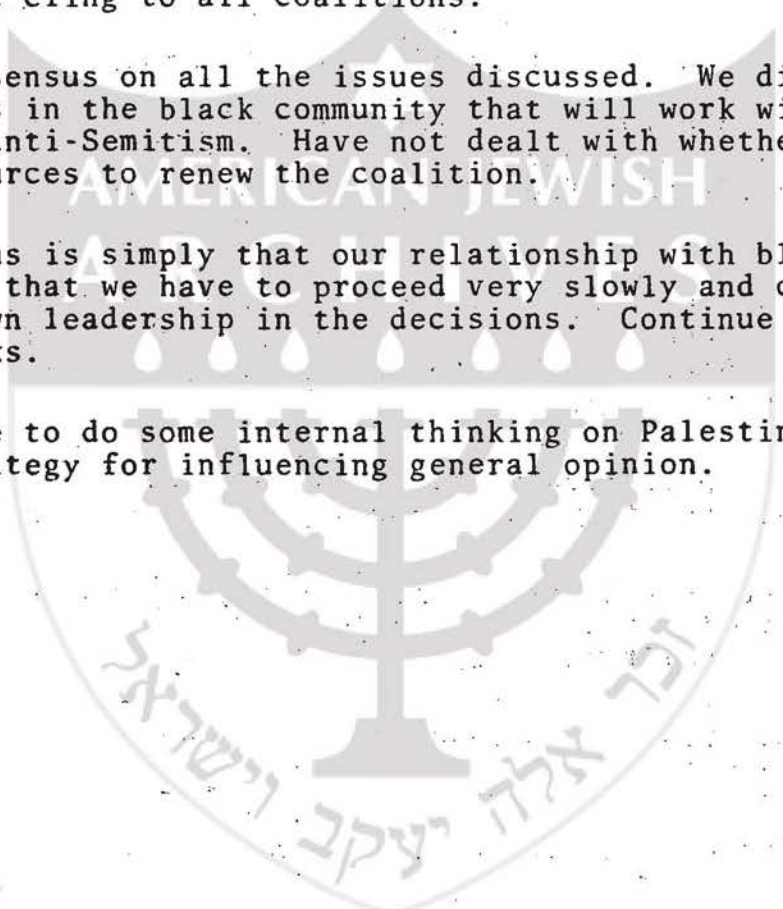
Bookie - Should say we will continue to do things that are in both interests, but do not need to stress efforts to demonstrate existence of coalition.

Kaufer - Jews are so isolated that we cannot afford to write any group off. Must cling to all coalitions.

Samet - No consensus on all the issues discussed. We did agree to work with forces in the black community that will work with us if they repudiate anti-Semitism. Have not dealt with whether we should devote our resources to renew the coalition.

Gold - Consensus is simply that our relationship with blacks has been shaken and that we have to proceed very slowly and carefully, involving our own leadership in the decisions. Continue local contacts with blacks.

Silverman - Have to do some internal thinking on Palestinian issue and develop strategy for influencing general opinion.



submitted by Harry Fleischman 9/10/79