

VT-886 Transcription

Marc H. Tanenbaum and Jesse Jackson discussion of Black-Jewish  
relations: Part II. 11 March 1987.

SPEAKER: ...our relations in the Jewish community.

JESSE JACKSON: Well, nothing is preventing me from running for a third time. But I choose to be on a coalition broad enough to defeat Reagan and his heritage. That's what I choose.

(applause) And, of course, I say it respectfully, that the challenge that we have before us tonight in this pluralism, to take bits and pieces of a broke-down relationship which will never be whole by definition. But take the best of what is in us and the worst of that which threatens us and pool?] that around a common agenda. [01:00]. That's our choice and may be our only chance. The fact that even in the glorious '60s, there was not this ideological labyrinth of communism often referred to. There were tensions even then. But when he said we chose on a scale of 10, said we agree on seven issues out of 10; let's move on. We didn't focus on three and decide not to relate, we focus on the seven. Which is the basis of any coalition. You focus; you maximize the plusses, minimize the minuses, and move on.

(inaudible) coalition between ethnic and religious groups, a coalition of, of partnership between husband and wife. If

you chose after x number of months to focus on that area of disagreement, [02:00] you've got divorce around the corner. (laughter, applause) If you choose to build on that which is even more dear to you, you will survive the tough times of difficult situations. Now, that is my view of coalition-building and I operate out of that frame of reference here today. (applause)

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

Q: This is to the Reverend Jackson, please? (laughter) [Busy night?]. Reverend, I am the president of the Jewish Activities Club here on campus, and we are attempting to establish a dialogue between the Black Student Union and my organization. The previous speaker, Mike Reese, is the president of the Black Student Union (audience response, laughter) and -- [03:00]

JACKSON: (inaudible). (laughter)

Q: -- and we have met and we do plan to meet in the future with him. We need your help. (laughter, applause; inaudible). The problem stems is that this is our campus and unfortunately none of the student news on campus (inaudible). (laughter) My, my second question, which has nothing to do with the first, is what is your relationship with Yasser Arafat?

JACKSON: I, I don't have a relationship with him. (laughter)

We've met one time. That's the answer; I do not have a relationship with him. What I do know [04:00] is that in the Middle East, my personal policy represents false security, and with a great amount of symbolism -- this administration has the right symbols and all the right rhetoric, but after seven years, there are more Israelis dead, more Arabs dead, more Americans dead, more Americans held hostage, and more money spent, more chaos, and less chance of peace. So apparently these symbols have been diversionary. My (inaudible) having been more on the (inaudible) of this county. Our challenge is to work out relationships with our enemies because we already have [it with?] our friends and you cannot get peace with the (inaudible) prayers. If they're enemies, they must be neutralized often, early, or otherwise [05:00] [a coexistent?] (inaudible). And I say this is about the (inaudible) it's another one of those charge issues. You in the (inaudible), who are trustworthy people, met with Arafat invariably who said to him we support that you support Israel's right to exist with security with actual recognized boundaries. But your focus ought to be on a, on a mutual recognition pact of mutual survival. We didn't take to him any money or a gun. We took to him a challenge for a mutual recognition thrust. That ought to be respected

and not condemned. That's good [kismet?]. That's the right thing to do. (applause) And so that's the relationship: (inaudible) we met, we met once [06:00] and that's that. As for you and Brother Reese (laughter) -- where's Brother Reese? Get up, get up. (laughter, applause) Q: Can Brother Reese come stand next to me, please?

JACKSON: (inaudible). (applause)

(inaudible). I'm going to give both of y'all (inaudible). Come on down Brother Reese we'll get this thing going. Rabbi Tanenbaum and I, we can argue, but we're too old to fight.

Q: Reverend?

JACKSON: Wait a minute now, let me go up this, see (inaudible) all together. I feel good (inaudible). (laughter, applause) See now, this that wasn't hard. (laughter, applause) (inaudible). And I'm telling you that's real good. This (inaudible). Please hear this folks. If the two of you won't develop a relationship, you will. Now, would recommend that you break down this barrier, have a little common sense to not put your hand (inaudible) on top of the agenda. Have that much common sense. Because you won't go no further than that. Let the whole agenda [item?], you know like, [normal?] racial killing in Queens -- y'all (inaudible). [08:00] So wait, wait, wait, wait, (inaudible) both be killing (inaudible), is that right, we check up on

that. Both of y'all agree that we should free South Africa. Check up on that. Both of y'all agree that we should maintain college scholarships and not replace them with loans. (inaudible). Point is, there are eight to ten items of serious items that you agree on. That's the areas of tension. How you view in the opposite history, personalities, (inaudible), if the base is laid, on issues of solid, honest-to-goodness survival, you will have the strength to survive the areas of tension. But if you start with the tension first, you'll never get to the areas that you agree on. (applause) [09:00] But the key to it all is that you've got to want to have a relationship together. You've got to want to do that. And out of that flows everything else. (applause)

SPEAKER: Our last question prior to the final comments of our speakers, Mr. [Al Saunders?].

Q: This, this question is, is addressed to both of the speakers. In view of the tough times that we face in here, [already?] (inaudible), could you tell us, how would you resolve the difference between blacks and Jews and the questions of jobs, on laws, you know, affirmative action. And, keeping in mind the business place of [10:00] the blacks and the Jewish people, which there is a big difference.

MARC TANENBAUM: I came to the microphone first because Christians do not have a monopoly on charity. And (inaudible) being a little modest (inaudible). (laughter) This is an issue of Jesse and (inaudible) indicated. Where Jews and blacks and indeed people of goodwill generally in American society, I think have a very important potential contribution to make. The problems of unemployment, the growing [11:00] change in the economic infrastructure of America, the decline of manufacturing, the decline of low-entry blue-collar jobs, have become an absolute disaster, especially for black young people in America. The transformation of our society increasingly [as?] cities and new information centers and service centers have made it, have made us into dual cities, where only the very wealthy or the very poor can survive. And it will get worse unless there is a common strategy worked out on how to provide fundamental (inaudible) fundamental job [duties?] of many young people, most of whom the regular unemployment among young blacks is double that of the general white society. The poverty rate among [12:00] young children in America has now become grotesque. These are the fundamental challenges that we have to face. This is one of the basic contributions that I believe that the Reverend Jesse Jackson's message will help contribute to, to the United

States, to the American people, through the Democratic Party, and I want to see him get a hearing for this. I think of the many candidates, Jesse Jackson has come forward frequently with an economic strategy for America that at least begins to make sense in terms of the real needs of society. (applause) In any case, let me say [rather?] complicated [and simple?], the Jewish community of the United States through its National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, representing perhaps some 21 American Jewish groups, is fundamentally [13:00] and firmly unalterably committed to the support of affirmative action for minority groups in this country. (applause) (inaudible) resolve conflicts that have developed over the issue of goals and timetables. The central question is that affirmative action is on the books. And a great many governmental agencies have not been implementing affirmative action. And they've been implementing that as they are required by law with vigorous watching of the way in which they move forward to provide these opportunities, we would not need discussions over quotas. Not only blacks and Jews among others can help (inaudible) in our government before I conclude and before we all disappear for the evening, I don't want to see people pass by without Jesse Jackson knowing from me personally I think on behalf

of many of us who were here in the Jewish community,  
[14:00] that we did not take for granted his act of moral  
courage and decency when he made a major point -- not a  
minor point, a major point -- of coming before Gorbachev in  
Geneva and presented to him the [call to the new rights?]  
of the Soviet Jews and other people. (applause) That, that  
commitment was (inaudible), representative of the kind of  
core issues about which we have much to talk. And I hope  
that Jesse and I, among many others, will have  
opportunities to talk about many issues including the  
Middle East and also the domestic issues of that which we  
have begun talking this evening. For me, this has been an  
extraordinary experience and I want to thank the president  
of the school and (inaudible) for having made it possible  
for Jesse Jackson and me [15:00] (inaudible) all of you  
were listening in on us. Thank you. (applause)

JACKSON: Three observations. One, for you, Rabbi Tanenbaum,  
another chance to meet and chat, debate, and dialogue, let  
me assure you that I respect you very much. Very much.  
Number two, central to my argument and strategy, in the  
face of areas of tension and my resistance to allowing any  
one or two things or people to destroy us and our feelings,  
I appreciate the comment about my (inaudible) [16:00]  
Gorbachev at Geneva. And I did. The Nazis, the neo-Nazis

are going to march on Spokane some years ago. And the basic white press (inaudible) saying the Jewish people in Spokane were overreacting. My wife and family stood in the pulpit of the temple with the rabbis because we chose to. As I confronted Gorbachev because I chose to. I walked down these dusty roads of Alabama and Mississippi together because we chose to. And look at the history of struggle and bloodshed and life risk is just too much invested to allow anything to blow it away. Lastly, there's a lot of pain in black American tonight. And Jewish friends, you must hear this. And black friends and brothers and sisters, hear this if you will, [17:00] because what's happened in the last six months may bring a whole affirmative action, (inaudible) issue into real focus. It may be this. If there was a (inaudible) about how many blacks or Jews had seats in this auditorium tonight, and we started using some system to determine who should have what seats, where they should sit, that assumes you have an auditorium. But if the whole auditorium burns up, then it's a moot issue. And right now, the auditorium is under siege. Ten years ago this issue of (inaudible) was raging. Blacks were sensitive because we knew that we had freedom but we didn't have equality. And we could not ever shake our caste [18:00] identification of color. We could do nothing to get past

our caste. So 10 years later, my friends, 10 years later, the university (inaudible) had 5% black students in 1976. Today its 2.5% and dropping. Thirty-one black (inaudible) 11 black. Harvard: 97 black freshmen last September, down 30% in 10 years. Princeton, 1,600 graduate students; 22 are black. Six hundred forty-five faculty members, seven are black. University of Michigan, 7.7% blacks in 1976, 5.0 today. Twenty-two hundred faculty members; 63 blacks on a tenure track. So this whole cut back thing, the impact of (inaudible) on us has been to [free up?] relation of any conscious obligation to recruit [19:00], admit, train, hire, and develop. So we have lost in these last 10 years in a major way. But if that wasn't correct, Reagan's budget cut now 5 billion of the 19 billion educational budget -- that threatens those who are [already on?] (inaudible). So you have the struggle for blacks and Jews must be at the front, and educational budget that's large enough to cover the blacks and Jews who want an education. They aren't going to get enough of (inaudible); we need enough for everybody. (applause)

SPEAKER: Ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you that I am very proud to have been part [20:00] of this program. I'm proud of you for being here, I'm proud of Queens College, and I think the definition of decency is the militant

opposition to bigotry. If the rabbi and the reverend and the two outspoken students can shake hands and agree to disagree and to really work together, we all have, and I believe, wearing an academic hat and not a politician's hat, that if these two communities can re-form coalition, politically and in every phase of life, both communities will be able to say for as long as that coalition lasts, never again. Thank you very much. (applause)

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