

We need to imagine a movement for liberation better even than the Exodus—an exodus where neither people has to leave. Where people stay to pick up the pieces, rearranging themselves not just as Jews or Palestinians but as antifascists and workers and artists. I want what Puerto Rican Jewish poet and activist Aurora Levins Morales describes in her poem “Red Sea”:

We cannot cross until we carry each other,
all of us refugees, all of us prophets.
No more taking turns on history’s wheel,
trying to collect old debts no-one can pay.
The sea will not open that way.
This time that country
is what we promise each other,
our rage pressed cheek to cheek
until tears flood the space between,
until there are no enemies left,
because this time no one will be left to drown
and all of us must be chosen.
This time it’s all of us or none.

Three Perspectives



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James Baldwin (1924-1987) was a profoundly influential Black novelist and essayist whose works include *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Giovanni's Room*, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, and many more.



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**On Zionism,
Jewishness,
Class, and
Liberation**

seems there is a very literal dimension to this axiom: *They are not asking*. Part of what has made the experience of this event feel so different from the status quo—and so different to Palestinians and Jews—comes from the fact that Palestinians were undeniably the actors, for once, not the acted upon. The protagonists of the story. I consider it an enormous failure of our movements that we have not been able to build a vehicle for that kind of reversal in any other way thus far. Our Jewish movements for Palestine were not powerful enough to stop other Jews from gunning down Palestinians in peaceful marches at the Gazan border fence, or to keep Palestinians from being fired, harassed, and sued for speaking the truth about their experience or—God forbid—advocating the nonviolent tactic of boycott. And now, we do not have a shared struggle able to credibly respond to these massacres of Israelis and Palestinians. With all of the work that many Jews and Palestinians have done to reach toward each other over the years, I believe at heart it is this failure that is now driving us apart. There is no formidable political formation that I know of that can hold the political subjectivity of both Jews and Palestinians in this moment without simply attempting to assimilate one into the other. No place where Jews and Palestinians who agree on the basics of Palestinian liberation—right of return, equality, and reparations—are poised to turn the synthesis of these two subjectivities into a coherent strategy.

One of the most terrible things about this event is the sense of its inevitability. The violence of apartheid and colonialism begets more violence. Many people have struggled with the straightjacket of this inevitability, straining to articulate that its recognition does not mean its embrace. I am reminding myself that it was from Palestinians, many of them writing and speaking in these pages, that I learned to think of Palestine as a site of possibility—a place where the very idea of the nation-state, which has so harmed both peoples, could be remade or destroyed entirely. And it was Palestinians who opened my thinking to multiple visions of sharing the land. On the left, I hope we do not mistake the inevitability of the violence for an inescapable limit on our work or the quality of our thought. Even if our dreams for better have failed, they must accompany us through this moment to the other side.

nonviolent avenues to liberation have been punished or ignored. Her reaction appears common to so many of the Palestinians I know and trust that I must try to feel my way into it.

As I watched people online debate the models of anti-colonial struggle, raising comparisons to Algeria and North America and South Africa, I found myself returning to the foundational Jewish liberation myth: the Exodus. It was hard not to think about the moment in the Passover seder when we lessen the wine in our full cups with our pinkies as we recite the plagues. This ritual has materialized as an indispensable touchstone, insisting that to hold onto our humanity we must grieve all violence, even against the oppressor.

But I also thought of the plagues themselves, particularly the final one, the slaying of the first born—children, adults, the elderly. It seems that hiding in our liberation myth is a recognition that violence will visit the oppressor society indiscriminately. I know that I have many friends, and that *Currents* has many readers, who are asking themselves how they can be part of a left that seems to treat Israeli deaths as a necessary, if not desirable, part of Palestinian liberation. But what Exodus reminds us is that the dehumanization that is required to oppress and occupy another people always dehumanizes the oppressor in turn. For people who feel like their pain is being devalued, it's because it is; and that devaluation is itself a hallmark of the cycle of the diminishing value of human life. As the abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore has said, "Where life is precious, life is precious." We are seeing the ways that Jews as the agents of apartheid will not be spared—even those of us who have devoted our lives to the work of ending it. (I am thinking of Hayim Katsman, *zichrono l'vracha*, killed by Hamas, an activist against the expulsion of the West Bank community of Masafer Yatta, and Vivian Silver, a hostage in Gaza, who is known to many of its residents as the person they meet at the Erez Crossing who advocates for and facilitates their transfers to Israeli hospitals for treatment.)

That question of how we recuperate this humanity is ultimately an organizing question. People have repeated over and over again over the last few days that you "cannot tell Palestinians how to resist." To me, it

Jewish settlers stole my house. It's not my fault they're Jewish.

Palestinians are told the words we use dwarf the decades of violence enacted against us by the self-proclaimed Jewish State. A drone is one thing, but a trope—a trope is unacceptable. No more.

BY MOHAMMED EL-KURD

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When we were growing up in occupied Jerusalem, the people seeking to expel us from our neighborhood were Jewish, and their organizations often had "Jewish" in their name. So were the people who stole our home, scattered our furniture in the street, and burned my baby sister's crib. The judges banging their gavels in favor of our expulsion were also Jewish, and so were the lawmakers whose laws facilitated and systematized our dispossession.

The bureaucrat issuing—and sometimes revoking—our blue ID cards was a Jew, and I especially despised him because a stroke of his pen stood between my father and my father's great-great-grandfather's city. As for the soldiers that were frisking us to check for those IDs, some of them were Druze, some Muslim, most of them Jewish, and all of them, according to my grandmother, were "godless bastards." Those who administered the rifles and handcuffs, those who wrote the meticulous and murderous urban plans were—you guessed it.

This was no secret. We lived under the rule of the self-proclaimed "Jewish State." Israeli politicians have exhausted this line, and their international peers nodded along. The army declared itself a Jewish army and marched under what it has called a Jewish flag. Jerusalem city councilmen boasted "tak[ing] house after house" because "the bible says that this country belongs to the Jewish people," and Knesset members sang similar tunes. These legislators weren't fringe or

far-right: the Israeli nation-state law explicitly enshrines “Jewish settlement” as a “national value ... to encourage and promote.”

Still, though this was no secret, we were instructed to treat it as such, sometimes by our parents, sometimes by well-meaning solidarity activists. We were instructed to ignore the Star of David on the Israeli flag, and to distinguish Jews from Zionists with surgical precision. It didn't matter that their boots were on our necks, and that their bullets and batons bruised us. Our statelessness and homelessness were trivial. What mattered was how we *spoke* about our keepers, not the conditions they kept us under—blockaded, surrounded by colonies and military outposts—or the fact that they kept us at all.

Language was more of a minefield than the border between Syria and the occupied Golan Heights, and we, children at the time, were expected to hop around them, hoping we don't accidentally step on an explosive trope that would discredit us. Using the “wrong words” had the magical ability to make things disappear; the boots, bullets, batons, and bruises all become invisible if you say anything in jest or in fury. Even more dangerously, believing in “the wrong things” rendered you deserving of this brutality. Citizenship and the right to movement weren't the sole privileges robbed from us, simple ignorance was a luxury as well.

As Palestinians, we understand from a young age that the semantic violence we practice with our words dwarfs the decades of systemic and material violence enacted against us by the self-proclaimed Jewish State. A drone is one thing, but a trope—a trope is unacceptable. We learn to internalize the muzzle.

So, I heeded these calls—what else is a 10-year-old supposed to do?—and I learned about Hitler and the Holocaust, I learned about the nose stereotype, the poisoned wells, the bankers, the vampires, the snakes and the lizards (I just found out about the octopus), and I learned that, when speaking to diplomats visiting our zoo of a neighborhood, the settlers squatting in our home must be the secondary point of my presentation, second to an effusive denunciation of global antisemitism. And when my 80-something grandmother addressed those foreign

disproportionate death tolls. And now, when we need it most, we find ourselves struggling with a lack of emotional and political vocabulary.

On October 7th, my own feelings fluctuated wildly. My first feeling was fear. To listen closely to the genocidal language of this Israeli government over the past year has been to live in terror of the day they would find the excuse to pursue it. Writing in *n+1*, *Jewish Currents* contributing editor David Klion recounts the words of a campus activist in the wake of 9/11: “They're already dead,” he'd said on the day Bush declared war on Iraqis, their fates sealed. I felt these words in my body, sobbing loudly in front of the screen. There were also bursts, very early on, of awe. I watched the image of the bulldozer destroying the Gaza fence again and again and cried tears of hope. I watched Palestinian teenagers seemingly out joyriding in a place half a mile away that they'd never been; a Gazan blogger suddenly reporting from Israel. But these images were quickly joined by others—the image of a woman's body, mostly naked and bent unnaturally in the back of a truck; rooms full of families lying in piles, the walls spattered in blood. I wanted desperately to keep these images separate—to hold close the liberatory metaphor and banish the violent reality. By the time I began to accept that these were pictures of the same event, I was distraught, and contending with a rising alienation from those who did not seem to share my grief, especially as the scope of the massacre came into view.

“I have anti-Zionist Jewish friends who are rightfully scared,” writer and reporter Hebh Jamal wrote in a recent *Mondoweiss* article. She observes how, despite all their sympathy for Palestinian suffering, this may be the first moment such allies are tasting the fear—and the state of mourning—that has been real for Palestinians for decades. She has also lost someone this week—a cousin, 20 years old. “I do not rejoice over death. I rejoice over the possibility to live,” she writes, and as such “I cannot condemn the militants if I believe even for a second that there might be a possibility of all of this finally coming to an end.” Hebh describes the sense of possibility that many Palestinians have felt in these events, as they have disturbed—perhaps only momentarily, it remains to be seen—the dominant paradigm in which they are condemned to die waiting for their freedom, as so many other

our brothers, our children. It's like we're stuck living in a nightmare." We will likely soon see this genocidal impulse spread, as the Israeli government hands out automatic weapons to West Bank settlers, many of whom were already armed eliminationists. In this way, Jewish grief is routed back into the violence of a merciless system of Palestinian subjugation that reigns from the river to the sea. It is mobilized by US politicians who support Benjamin Netanyahu and his extremist government, which has intensified Palestinian death and displacement and disappeared any hope of a diplomatic solution. It is marshaled to drum up support for sending weapons to Israel, even as we know that, as Haggai Mattar wrote in *+972 Magazine*, "there is no military solution to Israel's problem with Gaza, nor to the resistance that naturally emerges as a response to violent apartheid."

We can't let our grief be bent to these purposes, but it's not clear where else to put it. Anyone who has been working in this space knows that our movements are not prepared to manage the emotional and political fallout. We watch as Jewish people and groups we thought we had pulled into our struggle, or at least begun to move politically, suddenly close ranks, profess support for the IDF, retreat into despair. Already complex and fragile relationships between Palestinian and left-wing Jewish activists—as well as factions *within* both of these groups—are being challenged as we struggle to derive the same meaning from the images coming across our screens. Friends and colleagues on all sides find themselves hurt by one another's public reactions, or by their silence. A veteran anti-Zionist activist I spoke to wondered if a "chasm" was opening up between Palestinian and Jewish activists, especially as the current moment has made visible diaspora Jews' tangible connections to that place and those people that are, inconveniently, not just the stuff of Israeli propaganda. Over the weekend, many avowed anti-Zionist Jews found they could not join solidarity protests because they needed something the protests could not provide: a space to grieve the Israeli dead, to struggle with their own place in the coming political process. It is a situation none of us have ever before confronted in earnest, amid a long history of vastly

visitors, I corrected her mid-sentence whenever she described the Jewish settlers in our house as, well, Jewish.

A decade and some years later and not much has changed. The boot remains there; so are the bullets and batons (and I would be remiss not to mention the innovative genius of the AI-powered robot firearms recently added to the Jewish State's arsenal).

The government titles its project in the Galilee as "the Judaization of the Galilee," and its quasi-institutions do the same. As for the council members that promised to take "house after house," alongside their success in stealing houses, in Sheikh Jarrah, the Old City, Silwan, and elsewhere, they routinely march in our towns with megaphones and flags, chanting "we want Nakba now." The judges still bang their gavels to ensure the continuation of this Nakba; still rule in favor of Jewish supremacy. And, despite disagreeing with the Supreme Court on various things, parliamentarians legislate in accordance with that supremacist attitude. Some openly state the fact that Jewish life is simply "more important than [our] freedom" (and sometimes they're even nice enough to apologize to Arab TV presenters as they deliver them these hard truths).

A decade and some years later, the status quo remains as is. And we—how my heart breaks for us—we continue dancing among the land mines. We continue betting on morality and humanity, as they bet on their guns.

A few weeks ago, 16 Israeli police officers turned off their body cameras and branded, as in *physically etched*, the Star of David into the cheek of 22-year-old Orwa Sheikh Ali, a young man they arrested from the Shufat refugee camp.

Also a few weeks ago, MEMRI, a media watch group co-founded by a former Israeli military intelligence officer, released footage of PA President Mahmoud Abbas stating that Europeans "fought [the Jews] because of their social role" and "usury," and "not because of their religion."

In response, a group of renowned Palestinian intellectuals, many of whom I admire and respect, published an open letter "unequivocally

condemn[ing]”—guess what?—Abbas’ “morally and politically reprehensible comments.”

One could call their joint statement a ‘strategic’ move to negate the belief that Palestinians are born bigoted. Others may say it represents what having a “consistent moral code” looks like. I’m certain some signatories believe our so-called moral authority makes it incumbent upon us to deplore historical revisionism “vis-a-vis the Holocaust,” and to lead by example in rejecting all forms of racism, no matter how rhetorical.

Whatever it is, when I read it, I felt a sense of *deja vu*. Here we are, caught in a discursive crisis once more, hastily responding to crimes we haven’t committed. The strategy of defending ourselves against the baseless charge of antisemitism has historically brought us closer to it. And, more than that, such an impulse inadvertently elevates the history of Jewish suffering, which is certainly studied, if not honored, above our present-day suffering, a suffering that is denied and disputed.

While the signatories of the letter, some who’ve criticized the PA since before I was born, did decry the “PA’s increasingly authoritarian and draconian rule,” and while they made note of the “Western and pro-Israel forces” supporting Abbas’ expired presidential mandate, neither of those things served as the catalyst for what appears to be the first joint statement condemning Mahmoud Abbas. The letter didn’t spell his collaboration with the Zionist regime as its headline, nor his brutalization of protesters and political prisoners, let alone the murder of Nizar Banat.

The catalyst here was words. Mere words. And it always is. Again, a drone is one thing, but a trope is off-limits.

Ironically, both the joint letter and Abbas’ speech sought to distance themselves from antisemitism. Towards the end of the clip, Abbas wanted to “clarify” that he said what he said regarding “the Jews of Europe hav[ing] nothing to do with Semitism” because we ought to “know who we should accuse of being our enemy.”

What a burdensome impulse. Not only do we live in fear of displacement at the hands of a colonialism that professes *itself* as Jewish, not only are our people bombarded by an army that marches

THIS HAS BEEN THE HARDEST WEEK we’ve ever had to weather as a staff at *Jewish Currents*. Events are moving so fast that there seems no hope of apprehending any of it fully, of saying the thing that will feel right for the moment which is already gone. With great effort, we finish a section of our explainer only for new information to surface and invalidate it. And it’s not just about the facts. Feelings and positions are in flux. There are political questions and fault lines that have been simmering under the surface in our organization—in the Jewish left, and I suspect the left generally—exploding to the fore, gumming up the works at a time when urgency feels paramount. Staff members are periodically bursting into tears, fighting with their families or with their friends, running on fitful sleep. A contributor’s son is a hostage. A contributor in Gaza texts: “Still alive. They are bombing everywhere. Nowhere is safe.”

Most of our internal disagreements center on the correct container for our grief. Our staff is not unlike the rest of the Jewish world in that many of us are only a matter of degrees from someone who died or was taken hostage. How can we publicly grieve the death and suffering of Israelis without these feelings being politically metabolized against Palestinians?

We have good reason to worry about this: As Israelis count their dead, politicians in Israel and the US call for Palestinian blood in direct, genocidal language. “We are fighting human animals and we will act accordingly,” said Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant yesterday. “Finish them, Netanyahu,” said former Ambassador to the United Nations and Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley. “Neutraliz[e] the terrorists,” said Democratic senator John Fetterman. Jews share memes about the highest number of Jewish casualties since the Holocaust, not bothering to ask who, right now, is being ethnically cleansed, or how many massacres of this size Gaza has seen in the last dozen years. This language deploys the bombs that fall on Gazans from the sky, leveling whole neighborhoods, wiping out families without warning, huddled in their homes because they have nowhere to flee. “There are body parts scattered everywhere. There are still people missing,” one man north of Gaza City told CNN. “We’re still looking for

The ultimate hope for a genuine black-white dialogue in this country lies in the recognition that the driven European serf merely created another serf here, and created him on the basis of color. No one can deny that that Jew was a party to this, but it is senseless to assert that this was because of his Jewishness. One can be disappointed in the Jew if one is romantic enough--for not having learned from history; but if people did learn from history, history would be very different.

All racist positions baffle and appall me. None of us are that different from one another, neither that much better nor that much worse. Furthermore, when one takes a position one must attempt to see where that position inexorably leads. One must ask oneself, if one decides that black or white or Jewish people are, by definition, to be despised, is one willing to murder a black or white or Jewish baby: for *that* is where the position leads. And if one blames the Jew for having become a white American, one may perfectly well, if one is black, be speaking out of nothing more than envy.

If one blames the Jew for not having been ennobled by oppression, one is not indicting the single figure of the Jew but the entire human race, and one is also making a quite breathtaking claim for oneself. I know that my own oppression did not ennoble me, not even when I thought of myself as a practicing Christian. I also know that if today I refuse to hate Jews, or anybody else, it is because I know how it feels to be hated. I learned this from Christians, and I ceased to practice what the Christians practiced.

The crisis taking place in the world, and in the minds and hearts of black men everywhere, is not produced by the star of David, but by the old, rugged Roman cross on which Christendom's most celebrated Jew was murdered. And not by Jews.

“We Cannot Cross Until We Carry Each Other”

Arielle Angel

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under what *it* claims is the Jewish flag, and not only do Israeli politicians over enunciate the Jewishness of their operations, we are told to disregard the Star of David soaring on their flag—the Star of David they carve into our skin.

This impulse is decades, if not a century, old. In his handwritten transcript of a speech he gave in Cairo, October 1948, Palestinian scholar Khalil Sakakini struck through a fragment of a sentence that read “... the fighting between Arabs and Jews,” to replace it with “the fighting between us and the invaders.” Palestinian academics, the Institute for Palestine Studies, and the PLO's Palestine Research Center (which was looted and bombed repeatedly in 1980s) have dedicated articles, books, and volumes for the study of antisemitism, its European roots, and its manifestations—European or otherwise—and its conflation with anti-Zionism.

The Palestinian People have consistently made it crystal clear that our enemy is the colonialist and racist ideology of Zionism, not Jews. Our capacity to produce such distinction is admirable and impressive, considering the heavy-handedness with which Zionism attempts to synonymize itself with Judaism.

However, this distinction isn't our responsibility, and personally, it isn't my priority. A Palestinian's perceived resentment doesn't have the backing of a Knesset to codify it into law. Tropes aren't drones, nor can one convert conspiracy theories into nuclear weapons. We are past the early 1900s. Things are different, power has shifted. Words are not murder.

In the days between the 16 soldiers branding a man's face with the Star of David and the release of the joint letter, an Israeli soldier killed a disabled teenager near a military checkpoint in Qalqilya; another shot a child in the head in Silwan; a young man previously shot in an Israeli raid of the Balata refugee camp died of his injuries; a sniper shot a Palestinian youth in the head in Beita; a 17-year-old was shot and killed south of Jenin; one more young man succumbed to his wounds following an invasion of the refugee camp; families of Palestinians whose corpses are held by the Occupation authorities marched with empty caskets in Nablus; a soldier killed a man near Hebron, police executed a

14-year-old boy in Sheikh Jarrah to the applause of hundreds of settlers; the police then tear-gassed his family in Beit Hanina; a Palestinian was killed after ramming Israeli soldiers in Beit Sira, killing one; in the north of Jericho, a Palestinian man was killed and a soldier was injured in a gunfire exchange; a soldier shot a man in the head in Tubas, killing him—and this is only the very tip of the iceberg.

Which of these caused a far-reaching debate? None. There was a lot of noise concerning Itamar Ben-Gvir stating that Jewish life is “more important than [Palestinian] freedom” on television, a lot less noise about the carving of the Star of David, and, of course, Mahmoud Abbas received the noisiest reaction of all. (This is true in general, not just in the case of the open letter).

All three of those examples deal with aesthetics. Ben-Gvir’s statements were factual and true: Jewish life *is* worth more than ours under Israeli rule, but it was his explicit oration that triggered outrage rather than the institutionalized policies that have made his racist remarks the material reality on the ground. Even the physical deformation of a Palestinian’s face was only of note because of what the etching *symbolized*, not the etching itself—had the soldiers cut inconspicuous lines on his cheek, I doubt it would have garnered any attention at all.

As for Palestinian *death*, it is quotidian and negligible. If we’re lucky, our martyrs are communicated in sums on the pages of end-of-year reports. “Revisionism” on the other hand, warrants a cacophony of condemnation.

Here is where I stand. There is a Jew who lives—by force—in half of my home in Jerusalem, and he does so by “divine decree.” Many others reside—by force—in Palestinian houses, while their owners linger in refugee camps. It isn’t my fault that they are Jewish. I have zero interest in memorizing or apologizing for centuries-old tropes created by Europeans, or in giving semantics more heft than they warrant, chiefly when millions of us confront real, tangible oppression, living behind cement walls, or under siege, or in exile, and living with woes too expansive to summarize. I’m tired of the impulse to preemptively distance myself from something of which I am not guilty, and

to collect the rent. One risks libel by trying to spell this out too precisely, but Harlem is really owned by a curious coalition which includes some churches, some universities, some Christians, some Jews, and some Negroes. The capital of New York is Albany, which is not a Jewish state, and the Moses they sent us, whatever his ancestry, certainly failed to get the captive children free.

A genuinely candid confrontation between American Negroes and American Jews would certainly prove of inestimable value. But the aspirations of the country are wretchedly middle-class and the middle class can never afford candor.

What is really at question is the American way of life. What is really at question is whether Americans already have an identity or are still sufficiently flexible to achieve one. This is a painfully complicated question, for what now appears to be the American identity is really a bewildering and sometimes demoralizing blend of nostalgia and opportunism. For example, the Irish who march on St. Patrick’s Day, do not, after all, have any desire to go back to Ireland. They do not intend to go back to live there, though they may dream of going back there to die. Their lives, in the meanwhile, are here, but they cling, at the same time, to those credentials forged in the Old World, credentials which cannot be duplicated here, credentials which the American Negro does not have. These credentials are the abandoned history of Europe--the abandoned and romanticized history of Europe. The Russian Jews here have no desire to return to Russia either, and they have not departed in great clouds for Israel. But they have the authority of knowing it is there. The Americans are no longer Europeans, but they are still living, at least as they imagine, on that capital.

That capital also belongs, however, to the slaves who created it for Europe and who created it here; and in that sense, the Jew must see that he is part of the history of Europe, and will always be so considered by the descendant of the slave. Always, that is, unless he himself is willing to prove that this judgment is inadequate and unjust. This is precisely what is demanded of all the other white men in this country, and the Jew will not find it easier than anybody else?

nonviolent. On the contrary, the Jewish battle for Israel was saluted as the most tremendous heroism. How can the Negro fail to suspect that the Jew is really saying that the Negro deserves his situation because he has not been heroic enough? It is doubtful that the Jews could have won their battle had the Western powers been opposed to them. But such allies as the Negro may have are themselves struggling for their freedom against tenacious and tremendous Western opposition.

This leaves the American Negro, who technically represents the Western nations, in a cruelly ambiguous position. In this situation, it is not the American Jew who can either instruct him or console him. On the contrary, the American Jew knows just enough about this situation to be unwilling to imagine it again.

Finally, what the American Negro interprets the Jew as saying is that one must take the historical, the impersonal point of view concerning one's life and concerning the lives of one's kinsmen and children. "We suffered, too," one is told, "but we came through, and so will you. In time."

In whose time? One has only one life. One may become reconciled to the ruin of one's children's lives is not reconciliation. It is the sickness unto death. And one knows that such counselors are not present on these shores by following this advice. They arrived here out of the same effort the American Negro is making: they wanted to live, and not tomorrow, but today. Now, since the Jew is living here, like all the other white men living here, he wants the Negro to wait. And the Jew sometimes--often--does this in the name of his Jewishness, which is a terrible mistake. He has absolutely no relevance in this context as a Jew. His only relevance is that he is white and values his color and uses it.

He is singled out by Negroes not because he acts differently from other white men, but because he doesn't. His major distinction is given him by that history of Christendom, which has so successfully victimized both Negroes and Jews. And he is playing in Harlem the role assigned him by Christians long ago: he is doing their dirty work.

No more than the good white people of the South, who are really responsible for the bombings and lynchings, are ever present at these events, do the people who really own Harlem ever appear at the door

particularly tired of the assumption that I'm inherently bigoted. I'm tired of the pearl-clutching pretense that should such animosity exist, its existence would be inexplicable and rootless. Most of all, I'm tired of the false equivalence between semantic violence and systemic violence.

I know this essay is within itself a minefield. That it will be taken out of context and disseminated, but I'll never be a perfect victim—there's no escaping being accused of antisemitism. It's a losing battle and, more importantly, a glaring red herring. And it is time we reevaluate this tactic. There are better things to do: we have coffins to carry. We have kin in Israeli mortuary chambers that we must bury.

Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White

JAMES BALDWIN

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<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-antisem.html>

When we were growing up in Harlem our demoralizing series of landlords were Jewish, and we hated them. We hated them because they were terrible landlords, and did not take care of the building. A coat of paint, a broken window, a stopped sink, a stopped toilet, a sagging floor, a broken ceiling, a dangerous stairwell, the question of garbage disposal, the question of heat and cold, of roaches and rats--all questions of life and death for the poor, and especially for those with children--we had to cope with all of these as best we could. Our parents were lashed to futureless jobs, in order to pay the outrageous rent. We knew that the landlord treated us this way only because we were colored, and he knew that we could not move out.

The grocer was a Jew, and being in debt to him was very much like being in debt to the company store. The butcher was a Jew and, yes, we certainly paid more for bad cuts of meat than other New York citizens, and we very often carried insults home, along with the meat. We bought our clothes from a Jew and, sometimes, our secondhand shoes, and the pawnbroker was a Jew--perhaps we hated him most of all. The merchants along 125th Street were Jewish--at least many of them were; I don't know if Grant's or Woolworth's are Jewish names--and I well remember that it was only after the Harlem riot of 1935 that Negroes were allowed to earn a little money in some of the stores where they spent so much.

Not all of these white people were cruel--on the contrary, I remember some who were certainly as thoughtful as the bleak circumstances allowed--but all of them were exploiting us, and that was why we hated them.

But we also hated the welfare workers, of whom some were white, some colored, some Jewish, and some not. We hated the policemen, not all of whom were Jewish, and some of whom were black. The poor, of whatever color, do not trust the law and certainly have no reason so, and God knows we didn't. "If you *must* call a cop," we said in those days, "for God's sake, make sure it's a white one." We did not feel that the cops were protecting us, for we knew too much about the reasons for the kinds of crimes committed in the ghetto; but we feared black cops even more than white cops, because the black cop had to work so much harder--on *your* head--to prove to himself and his colleagues that he was not like all the other niggers.

We hated many of our teacher at school because they so clearly despised us and treated us like dirty, ignorant savages. Not all of these teachers were Jewish. Some of them, alas, were black. I used to carry my father's union dues downtown for him sometimes. I hated everyone in that den of thieves, especially the man who took the envelope from me, the envelope which contained my father's hard-earned money, that envelope which contained bread for his children. "Thieves," I thought, "every one of you!" And I know I was right about that, and I have not

What will the Christian world, which is so uneasily silent now, say on that day which is coming when the black native of South Africa begins to massacre the masters who have massacred him so long? It is true that two wrongs don't make a right, as we love to point out to the people we have wronged. But *one* wrong doesn't make a right, either. People who have been wronged will attempt to right the wrong; they would not be people if they didn't. They can rarely afford to be scrupulous about the means they will use. They will use such means as come to hand. Neither, in the main, will they distinguish one oppressor from another, nor see through to the root principle of their oppression.

In the American context, the most ironical thing about Negro anti-Semitism is that the Negro is really condemning the Jew for having become an American white man--for having become, in effect, a Christian. The Jew profits from his status in America, and he must expect Negroes to distrust him for it. The Jew does not realize that the credential he offers, the fact that he has been despised and slaughtered, does not increase the Negro's understanding. It increases the Negro's rage.

For it is not here, and not now, that the Jew is being slaughtered, and he is never despised, here, as the Negro is, *because* he is an American. The Jewish travail occurred across the sea and America rescued him from the house of bondage. But America is the house of bondage for the Negro, and no country can rescue him. What happens to the Negro here happens to him *because* he is an American.

When an African is mistreated here, for example, he has recourse to his embassy. The American Negro who is, let us say, falsely arrested, will find it nearly impossible to bring his case to court. And this means that *because* he is a native of this country--"one of your niggers"--he has, effectively, no recourse and no place to go, either within the country or without. He is a pariah in his own country and a stranger in the world. This is what it means to have one's history and one's ties to one's ancestral homeland totally destroyed.

This is not what happened to the Jew and, therefore, he has allies in the world. That is one of the reasons no one has ever seriously suggested that the Jew be nonviolent. There was no need for him to be

scale the walls and achieve what they wished. Wealth, rank, or an imposing name counted for nothing. The only credential the city asked was the boldness to dream."

But this is not true for the Negro, and not even the most successful or fatuous Negro can really feel this way. His journey will have cost him too much, and the price will be revealed in his estrangement--unless he is very rare and lucky--from other colored people, and in his continuing isolation from whites. Furthermore, for every Negro boy who achieves such a taxi ride, hundreds, at least, will have perished around him, and not because they lacked the boldness to dream, but because the Republic despises their dreams.

Perhaps one must be in such a situation in order really to understand what it is. But if one is a Negro in Watts or Harlem, and knows why one is there, and knows that one has been sentenced to remain there for life, one can't but look on the American state and the American people as one's oppressors. For that, after all, is exactly what they are. They have corralled you where you are for their ease and their profit, and are doing all in their power to prevent you from finding out enough about yourself to be able to rejoice in the only life you have.

One does not wish to believe that the American Negro can feel this way, but that is because the Christian world has been misled by its own rhetoric and narcotized by its own power.

For many generations the natives of the Belgian Congo, for example, endured the most unspeakable atrocities at the hands of the Belgians, at the hands of Europe. Their suffering occurred in silence. This suffering was not indignantly reported in the Western press, as the suffering of white men would have been. The suffering of this native was considered necessary, alas, for European, Christian dominance. And, since the world at large knew virtually nothing concerning the suffering of this native, when he rose he was not hailed as a hero fighting for his land, but condemned as a savage, hungry for white flesh. The Christian world considered Belgium to be a civilized country; but there was not only no reason for the Congolese to feel that way about Belgium; there was no possibility that they could.

changed my mind. But whether or not all these people were Jewish, I really do not know.

The Army may or may not be controlled by Jews; I don't know and I don't care. I know that when I worked for the Army I hated all my bosses because of the way they treated me. I don't know if the post office is Jewish but I would certainly dread working for it again. I don't know if Wanamaker's was Jewish, but I didn't like running their elevator and I didn't like any of their customers. I don't know if Nabisco is Jewish, but I didn't like clearing their basement. I don't know if Riker's is Jewish, but I didn't like scrubbing their floors. I don't know if the big, white bruiser who thought it was fun to call me "Shine" was Jewish, but I know I tried to kill him--and he stopped calling me "Shine." I don't know if the last taxi driver who refused to stop for me was Jewish, but I know I hoped he'd break his neck before he got home. And I don't think that General Electric or General Motors or R.C.A. or Con Edison or Mobil Oil or Coca Cola or Pepsi-Cola or Firestone or the Board of Education or the textbook industry or Hollywood or Broadway or television--or Wall Street, Sacramento, Dallas, Atlanta, Albany or Washington--are controlled by Jews. I think they are controlled by Americans, and the American Negro situation is a direct result of this control. And anti-Semitism among Negroes, inevitable as it may be, and understandable, alas, as it is, does not operate to menace this control, but only to confirm it. It is not the Jew who controls the American drama. It is the Christian.

The root of anti-Semitism among Negroes is, ironically, the relationship of colored peoples--all over the globe--to the Christian world. This is a fact which may be difficult to grasp, not only for the ghetto's most blasted and embittered inhabitants, but also for many Jews, to say nothing of many Christians. But it is a fact, and it will not ameliorated--in fact, it can only be aggravated--by the adoption, on the part of colored people now, of the most devastating of the Christian vices.

Of course, it is true, and I am not so naive as not to know it, that many Jews despise Negroes, even as their Aryan brothers do. (There are also Jews who despise Jews, even as their Aryan brothers do.) It is true

that many Jews use, shamelessly, the slaughter of the 6,000,000 by the Third Reich as proof that they cannot be bigots--or in the hope of not being held responsible for their bigotry. It is galling to be told by a Jew whom you know to be exploiting you that he cannot possibly be doing what you know he is doing because he is a Jew. It is bitter to watch the Jewish storekeeper locking up his store for the night, and going home. Going, with *your* money in his pocket, to a clean neighborhood, miles from you, which you will not be allowed to enter. Nor can it help the relationship between most Negroes and most Jews when part of this money is donated to civil rights. In the light of what is now known as the white backlash, this money can be looked on as conscience money merely, as money given to keep the Negro happy in his place, and out of white neighborhoods.

One does not wish, in short, to be told by an American Jew that his suffering is as great as the American Negro's suffering. It isn't, and one knows that it isn't from the very tone in which he assures you that it is.

For one thing, the American Jew's endeavor, whatever it is, has managed to purchase a relative safety for his children, and a relative future for them. This is more than your father's endeavor was able to do for you, and more than your endeavor has been able to do for your children. There are days when it can be exceedingly trying to deal with certain white musical or theatrical celebrities who may or may not be Jewish--what, in show business, is a name?--but whose preposterous incomes cause one to think bitterly of the fates of such people as Beside Smith or King Oliver or Ethel Waters. Furthermore, the Jew can be proud of his suffering, or at least not ashamed of it. His history and his suffering do not begin in America, where black men have been taught to be ashamed of everything, especially their suffering.

The Jew's suffering is recognized as part of the moral history of the world and the Jew is recognized as a contributor to the world's history: this is not true for the blacks. Jewish history, whether or not one can say it is honored, is certainly known: the black history has been blasted, maligned and despised. The Jew is a white man, and when white men rise up against oppression, they are heroes: when black men rise, they have reverted to their native savagery. The uprising in the Warsaw

ghetto was not described as a riot, nor were the participants maligned as hoodlums: the boys and girls in Watts and Harlem are thoroughly aware of this, and it certainly contributes to their attitude toward the Jews.

But, of course, my comparison of Watts and Harlem with the Warsaw ghetto will be immediately dismissed as outrageous. There are many reasons for this, and one of them is that while America loves white heroes, armed to the teeth, it cannot abide bad niggers. But the bottom reason is that it contradicts the American dream to suggest that any gratuitous, unregenerate horror can happen here. We make our mistakes, we like to think, but we are getting better all the time.

Well, to state it mildly, this is a point of view which any sane or honest Negro will have some difficulty holding. Very few Americans, and this includes very few Jews, wish to believe that the American Negro situation is as desperate and dangerous as it is. Very few Americans, and very few Jews, have the courage to recognize that the America of which they dream and boast is not the America in which the Negro lives. It is a country which the Negro has never seen. And this is not merely a matter of bad faith on the part of Americans. Bad faith, God knows, abounds, but there is something in the American dream sadder and more wistful than that.

No one, I suppose, would dream of accusing the late Moss Hart of bad faith. Near the end of his autobiography, "Act One," just after he has become a successful playwright, and is riding home to Brooklyn for the first time in a cab, he reflects:

"I started through the taxi window at a pinch-faced 10-year-old hurrying down the steps on some morning errand before school, and I thought of myself hurrying down the streets on so many gray mornings out of a doorway and a house much the same as this one. My mind jumped backward in time and then whirled forward, like a many-faceted prism--flashing our old neighborhood in front of me, the house, the steps, the candy store--and then shifted to the skyline I had just passed by, the opening last night, and the notices I still hugged tightly under my arm. It was possible in this wonderful city for that nameless little boy--for any of its millions--to have a decent chance to