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Cheryl Lynn Greenberg: Troubling the Waters

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Introduction

When Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. marched side by side from Selma to Birmingham in 1965, the image symbolized for many the powerful “black-Jewish” alliance. Certainly, a shared commitment to equality and concerted joint action between blacks and Jews had helped produce substantial civil rights advances. By the late 1960s, however, this potent coalition seemed to unravel as the two groups split over both style and policy. The decline of cooperative action has led many to bemoan the passing of a “golden age” when Jewish Americans and African Americans not only worked together but shared a vision of the just society.

This book examines the reality behind the “golden age” by exploring its roots in the time before the heyday of cooperation and challenging facile explanations for its passing. Focusing on liberal political organizations as sites of interaction, I seek to temper the idealized vision of perfect mutuality by demonstrating that blacks and Jews had different but overlapping goals and interests which converged in a particular historical moment; that both communities recognized that convergence as well as an opportunity for cooperation, and came together in a structurally powerful way to achieve those goals more effectively; that fundamental differences of approach and priority remained, which manifested themselves in low-level tensions and occasional sharp disagreements; and that those divergent visions contributed to the later weakening of the alliance as external political realities changed. A blend of political, institutional, and social history, this is a case study of two important communities navigating among competing and sometimes contradictory demands. At the same time, the history of relations between African Americans and Jewish Americans also lies at the crossroads of many larger narratives about race, religion, ethnicity, class, politics, and identity in twentieth-century America. This book, then, also speaks to these broader subjects.

The topic of black-Jewish relations in the United States is not merely a subject for quiet intellectual study, however. It has a presence in American public culture that “black-Greek relations” or “Jewish-Presbyterian relations” generally do not. Stories about the subject enjoy wide circulation even in the nonblack, non-Jewish press. This fascination is evident too, if we consider other silences. Several years ago, during the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson’s entry into major league baseball, reporters high-

lighted the role of Branch Rickey, the manager who signed him. That coverage never referred to “black-Methodist relations” although certainly if Rickey had been a Jew, the stories would have placed black-Jewish relations front and center. And as a nice Jewish girl devoted to teaching and researching African American history, the topic of black-Jewish relations is also quite personal. To understand myself, I had to make sense of all of this.

Even within the scholarly community, the study of black-Jewish relations has been a battlefield, filled with exploding polemics and shell-shocked casualties. Even excluding extremist rantings and anti-Semitic and racist diatribes, sharp and fundamental disagreements remain. While virtually all scholars and journalists acknowledge that blacks and Jews worked together for civil rights at mid-century, they differ over the nature and makeup of that relationship, whether or not it constituted an “alliance,” the motives of the players, and the cause of their apparent ultimate estrangement.

One position, held by and large by the broader “lay” Jewish community and many Jewish academics, is that blacks and Jews have historically had an identity of interest and experience which brought them together in the twentieth century in what these nostalgists term a “natural alliance,” or a “golden age,” enhanced by Jews’ enduring commitment to social justice. This cooperation was marked by a shared recognition of bigotry and discrimination, and a shared liberal vision of the post-civil-rights-struggle world. The alliance, which produced dramatic victories in court, in state legislatures, in Congress, and in public opinion, collapsed in the late 1960s, felled by militant black nationalist separatists who expelled white people, allied themselves with a third-world anti-Zionism, and spouted anti-Semitic rhetoric. Jewish activist-turned-academic Murray Friedman perhaps best embodies this view, summed up in the title of his book on the subject, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance*.¹

One opposing position, perhaps best represented by African American intellectual Harold Cruse,² questions not the fact of extensive Jewish involvement with black civil rights, but rather Jews’ motives. It holds that Jews infiltrated and exploited the movement to promote their own interests, masking their true agenda (improvement of Jewish status) by claiming to be fighting for racial equality. Once discovered to be false friends, they were purged from an increasingly authentic nationalist struggle for self-determination.

Others question the extent of the alleged mutuality of interest. Many scholars from David Levering Lewis to Herbert Hill have argued that black-Jewish collaboration was, and is, primarily a story of elites, whose motivations were multiple and complex, neither wholly manipulative nor

wholly altruistic.³ The broader Jewish community, such scholars insist, was more often either uninterested in, or outright opposed to, the advancement of black people, especially when it threatened their hard-won turf. As for black folks, they argue, only African American elites viewed Jews as different from other whites. This interpretation that black-Jewish coalitions occurred solely among elites is disputed not only by historians such as Hasia Diner,⁴ but also by many of the religious congregations to whom I speak, and by many activists, past and present, who have devoted themselves to the struggle for racial justice.

Meanwhile scholars who work on other arenas of black-Jewish interaction, like Jeffrey Melnick and Michael Rogin, remind us that Jewish involvement in civil rights was not the central story, but only one of a multitude of stories, all of which shaped what we call black-Jewish relations.⁵ To these authors, the recently visible antagonism between the two communities is simply a public manifestation of longstanding differences.

When I was studying for my graduate-school qualifying exams, survivors advised that if I didn't know the answer to a question, I should respond, "Some of both." (In previous years, I understand, the answer was "the working class," an answer I also like.) I take my training seriously, and my current work on black-Jewish relations responds to each of the debates I've described with "some of both." The story is too nuanced to fit neatly into any of the either/or alternatives that have been constructed for it.

This complexity, after all, is part of the message of scholars like Melnick and Adolph Reed Jr.: there is no single black community, no single Jewish community. Both groups have polarizing internal differences based on class, region, gender, politics, generation, occupation, and a host of other less tangible factors. The resulting internecine disputes fractured unity, and community sentiment often collided with organizational priorities. There have also been many venues in which African Americans and Jewish Americans have interacted; there are multiple "black-Jewish relations." There is the relationship between the civil rights organizations in both communities that fought for many of the same goals, sometimes separately and sometimes in collaboration. There is also the relationship between black and Jewish activists within the same organizations, from the Communist Party to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. There is the relationship between blacks and Jews in the music and movie industries, in labor unions, and in the garment trades. There is the relationship between members of the two communities in their everyday interactions, affected as they necessarily were by the economic and power inequities that race and class differences produced and by recurring allegations of black anti-Semitism and Jewish racism.

These categories of relations overlap, surely, but they are not the same. Nevertheless, both scholars and polemicists often use idiosyncratic individuals to represent their communities: what I call the “Goodman and Schwerner Were Jewish” school. Neither the NAACP’s Jack Greenberg nor the Federal Reserve’s Alan Greenspan stands for all Jews; neither Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. nor Minister Louis Farrakhan reflects the beliefs of all African Americans. That Goodman and Schwerner were Jewish says nothing about the commitment of the Jewish community writ large to the problems facing African Americans. Nor is it valid to infer the end of political collaboration between black and Jewish organizations from violence in Crown Heights or anti-Semitic pronouncements by black rappers.

And yet there is something here. Individuals, community politics, economic realities, and intergroup relations within these different “black-Jewish relations” interact. In certain important ways, I would suggest that it is, in fact, no coincidence that Jewish-born Jack Greenberg served as the NAACP’s chief counsel, Herbert Hill as its head of labor relations, Joel Spingarn as a founder, and Spingarn and Kivie Kaplan as its presidents. (Similarly I am not surprised by the interest of Alan Greenspan in the markets, given Jews’ historical dependence on finance to keep them safe—and mobile—in anti-Semitic and periodically violent Europe.) It is significant that Goodman and Schwerner were Jewish (it may say something about what motivated these two to action), and that a disproportionate number of white civil rights activists were as well. Jewish agencies engaged with their African American counterparts in a more sustained and fundamental way than did other white groups largely because their constituents and their understanding of Jewish values and Jewish self-interest pushed them in that direction.⁶

This claim, of course, only raises the larger question of why that is so. And that can be answered only by recognizing that all these debates over the nature of black-Jewish relations I have described are rooted in larger questions about identity, race, class, and liberalism. And, like “black-Jewish relations,” these terms are themselves contested.

First, what do we mean by Jews? Scholars have long debated the nature of Jewish identity. Are American Jews better understood as members of a religion or of an ethnic group?⁷ To put the question in our framework, which model better explains Jews’ disproportionate engagement with civil rights?

Many Jewish activists identified their religion as motivating their actions. “[I]t is our moral obligation as Jews not to desist from being a light unto the nation,” one anti-segregationist Virginia rabbi preached in 1958.⁸ But while faith clearly motivated many, Jewish engagement can not be attributed solely to religious impulses. Jewish activists’ perceptions that Judaism demanded universalist equality is itself an interpretation

shaped by historical forces. Both Christian and Jewish theologies proclaim that all human beings were created in God's image and describe the pursuit of justice as a moral imperative. Both also contain parochialism and bigotry. Judaism's theology is not ethically distinctive enough, nor have Jews throughout history routinely acted progressively enough, to account for the disproportionately high numbers of American Jews in civil rights efforts. Furthermore, we see this engagement operating even in those born-Jewish activists who did not consider themselves religious.⁹

Rather, the high level of Jewish civil rights engagement seems strongly related to Jewishness as a historical, ethnic identity, shaped by circumstances and forces peculiar to the Jewish people, and the attendant decision of much of twentieth-century American Jewry to stress social activism and cultural pluralism (and in some cases socialism or communism) as the highest expressions of that identity. Even in 2000, close to 90 percent of Jews interviewed reported their ethnic heritage to be "somewhat" or "very" important to them, a figure comparable to that for African Americans but substantially higher than those for other white ethnics questioned. But these Jews' attendance at religious services (more than half reported going only on "special occasions") is well below that of any other group. (Religion? Ethnicity? Some of both.)¹⁰

The concept of race requires similar examination. While "race" is a notoriously slippery concept to define, virtually no serious scholars any longer consider it a legitimate biological or genetic category. Not only has continuous intermixing of populations made race meaningless in this sense (there is no trait for which differences between putative racial groups are greater than those within the group), but as biologists remind us, every physical trait has a unique pattern of distribution, and any of these could plausibly have been called upon to define the boundaries of "races." A further difficulty in defining race lies in the assumption that individuals have only one race, when many people have ancestors from more than one racial group. The criteria for defining who is black, for example, have changed many times in this country.¹¹

Nevertheless, it is no use pretending that race has had no lived historical reality. "Race" has meaning in the United States (and most of the rest of the world) based on the widely divergent historical experiences of populations whose ancestors came from different continents, and who enjoyed differential access to power based on that ancestry. In other words, "race" has historical meaning because people acted as if it had meaning. Much of our history is a tragic reflection of this fact. Scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant have offered a useful definition of race in this context: "Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies." That is, "race" links certain physical phenotypical traits with certain abilities, behaviors,

and desires; “racism” exploits those alleged links to justify unequal access to social goods based on those physical differences.¹² The social and historical reality of race does not imply that the meaning of race (or racism) is everywhere and always the same, but rather that in societies where access to power has been allocated on the basis of supposedly biological categories, the consequences have real and enduring legacies.

This ever-shifting terrain of racial negotiation helps explain why blond, blue-eyed Walter White, longtime executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was considered (and considered himself) black, and how he successfully passed for white among a lynch mob. It is also central to any discussion of Jews, whose racial designation has certainly had its own ambiguities.

Particularly since the emergence of “whiteness studies” many scholars have advanced the thesis (and I am among them) that (European) Jews in the United States have benefited from having white skin, even when they rejected a white identity, and that their whiteness has informed their politics more than they recognize.¹³ Others, particularly those who study Jewish history, and many leftist activists, flatly reject this claim, arguing that Jews have never been seen, nor have they ever seen themselves, as fully white. They would echo Birdie, the biracial protagonist of *Caucasia* who, posing as Jesse Goldman, remarks, “I wasn’t really passing because Jews weren’t really white, more like an off-white.”¹⁴

But in the case of black-Jewish relations, the ambiguity of Jews’ whiteness also played out in reverse. If Jews were not entirely white, they nonetheless often “stood in” for whites in black people’s minds, and absorbed the full force of their racial resentment, promoted by both propinquity and the ubiquity of anti-Semitism. “[J]ust as a society must have a scapegoat,” James Baldwin observed, “so hatred must have a symbol. Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew.”¹⁵ Unpacking race from ethnicity or religion is a challenge, especially when the players themselves were none too clear about the distinction.

Jews served this “stand-in” function because so many worked in black neighborhoods as landlords, shopkeepers, and middlemen. This attests both to Jews’ greater willingness than other whites to serve black folk and to the differential black and Jewish economic potential in the United States. Rooted in the specifics of African American and Jewish American histories, rather than in any timeless truths, these facts remind us that black-Jewish engagement is historically contingent and ethnic rather than essential and theological. They also point us once again to a larger historical discussion that intersects this one, that of class. Even studies focused on political relationships between black and Jewish Americans must consider the role class position played: how did each community understand the class differences between them, how do those differences relate

to the frequent allegations of racism and anti-Semitism, and how did they shape the reaction of both blacks and Jews to those allegations?

For a great many reasons related to these ambiguities of identity, race, and class, black and Jewish histories intersected in what publisher and nationalist ideologue Henry Luce famously termed the American Century. Blacks and Jews have been neighbors, competitors, allies, and antagonists, linked in the minds of bigots, mid-century progressives, and each other. Their relationship has had a particularly powerful resonance in the American imagination.

There are many ways to approach this complex story; I have chosen to focus on national black and Jewish civil rights agencies. I use such a lens because it seems to me that to determine the nature and extent of a black and Jewish civil rights collaboration, one must concentrate on relations between the political organs of the two communities. Certainly that cannot be the whole story; the American Jewish Committee does not speak for all Jews, nor does the NAACP speak for all African Americans. Nevertheless, these organizations are better bellwethers for identifying the broader community's convictions than are individuals.

In part, this is obvious; organizations represent more people than individuals do. But there is more to it. First, these organizations not only claim to represent their communities but also rely on a broad membership base to support themselves. They cannot safely go far beyond the range of views their constituents hold. The interactions of the American Jewish Congress Women's Division and National Council of Negro Women, say, were driven in large measure by the concerns and commitments of their constituent communities, whose attitudes were in turn generally shaped by their quotidian experiences and by their understanding of their place within the larger society. In other words, the many black communities affected choices made by black civil rights agencies; the many Jewish communities shaped Jewish communal responses to civil rights. At the same time (and this is my second reason for using this institutional approach), within both communities those who disagreed with these organizations also appear in agency records as gadflies; their letters, essays, and speeches allow us to at least consider these alternate perspectives. While no approach can adequately represent such complex communities, and no method can define precisely the extent of community agreement with any particular organizational view, considering both agencies and naysayers begins to fill out the picture of what we call black-Jewish relations. It helps us also to better understand the pressures those agencies faced and the decisions they made. And, finally, my study focuses on national liberal organizations, arguably among the most elite and typically managed from the top down, because by the second half of the century, when the civil

rights movement hit its stride, they had become the most active and successful in promoting a politics of coalition between blacks and Jews.

Even when the topic is narrowed in this way, black-Jewish relations remain a chaos of contradictory perspectives. Black and Jewish political organizations and the communities they claimed to represent often held contrasting views. So did community members themselves. Organizations within the same community differed in approach, organizing principles, priorities, and focus. Defensive and ameliorative approaches coexisted in the same agencies. Local personalities, political dynamics, and population shifts created different patterns of interaction in every community. And even the same individual could hold conflicting and contradictory positions. But within the chaos was some consistency: as Kurt Lewin of the American Jewish Congress discovered to his surprise in a 1945 study he conducted, “many aspects of the inner structure are similar in different minority groups. For instance, not only the Jews seem to fight among themselves.”¹⁶

Despite all these ever-changing variables, a fairly consistent pattern of challenge and conciliation between the two communities emerges. Differences in region, demographics, and local particularities affected the timing of this pattern, but not its overall shape or its structural tensions. Across the nation, African Americans and Jewish Americans, increasingly brought together as political allies, found themselves divided as racial, ethnic, religious, and class competitors. How they negotiated those contradictions defines black-Jewish relations.

If we look beyond these trees of black-Jewish relations for a moment, we also discover a forest: twentieth-century American liberalism, the larger political framework in which these organizations operated. Reshaped in the century’s early decades, liberalism became for a brief span of time transcendent, only to lose much of its relevance and political credibility by the century’s close. I suggest that the history of political relations between African Americans and American Jews reflects, in microcosm, the history of American liberalism. Not only have African Americans and Jewish Americans long been America’s quintessential liberals, they have been so because of their deep commitment to what they understand to be its tenets: cultural pluralism, individual equality, and the obligation of the state to protect and extend both. The potency of postwar coalitions both resulted from and reflected the triumph of postwar liberalism; their subsequent decline can be traced to the fate of liberalism in the turbulent 1960s and beyond.

At the same time, the cold war helped insure that liberal, integrationist groups, as opposed to those farther to the left or right, would dominate the political landscape, and that their choices and their limitations would shape the civil rights agenda. The trajectory of black-Jewish relations,

then, can tell us much about the fate and potential future of liberalism, at least as it relates to race. And to the extent that liberal values shaped the parameters of black and Jewish political collaboration, the trajectory of liberalism can tell us much about the fate and potential future of black-Jewish relations.

Both an intellectual construct and a political label, liberalism in the United States has had varied and often contradictory meanings over the life of the American republic, and I can do little more than trace its barest outlines here. Its origins lay in Enlightenment Europe, where it stood against despotism and religious control and extolled individual freedom. Yet most nineteenth-century liberals lived quite comfortably with racism, female disenfranchisement, and other positions we would today view as contradictions, understanding them as part of the natural order within which liberalism operated. Furthermore, given its origins in resistance to tyranny, traditional liberalism feared the state as potential usurper of rights and sought to minimize its power and reach. In the United States this distrust of government remained until the (often ignored) urgings of Progressives, the central planning of World War I, the New Deal, and finally World War II revealed to many liberals the power of the state to do good.

By the 1940s American liberalism had taken on a new character, chastened by Nazi racism, emboldened by new ideas of state power, heartened by the triumph of democracy, energized by anticolonialism but fearful of communism—or anything that looked like communism. This postwar liberalism has at its root four basic assumptions. First, rights accrue to individuals, not groups. Second, although achievement depends on the individual, the state has a role to play in guaranteeing equality of opportunity (but not equality of outcome). Third, in a capitalist democracy, liberalism stresses reform rather than revolution, compromise rather than confrontation. Finally, as its goal for civil society, liberalism enthrones pluralism, the championing of difference within a broadly agreed-upon framework of what constitutes socially acceptable behavior. The modern concept of liberalism is more complex than this, of course, but it is along these axes of individualism, moderation, limited state intervention, and pluralism that I suggest that the black-Jewish political relationship operated, and later, came apart.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for our inquiry. Despite their very different histories, by the early twentieth century both blacks and Jews in the United States faced discrimination and bigotry based on involuntary, inherited characteristics. While antiblack racism was always the more pervasive and deep-seated, both Jews and blacks endured exclusion from certain jobs, neighborhoods, schools, and social facilities. Racist and anti-Semitic

references were prevalent in the media as well as in polite conversation, and while racism was certainly the more pernicious, both had been known to erupt into violence. All this impelled both communities to establish agencies to protect and promote their rights and opportunities; these ranged from mass to elite, nationalist to integrationist, local to national, conservative to radical.¹⁷

At the same time that each community was navigating its own way through the American system, the two groups came into increasing contact with each other. A black migration northward intersected with an eastern European Jewish immigration to American urban centers, North and South. This led to greater interaction, for better and for worse, and also to a greater awareness of each other's difficulties. Coupled with their commitment to safeguarding their own culture in the face of coercive assimilation, this awareness prompted a sense of identification between these apparently fellow victims, despite Jewish racism and black anti-Semitism.

The evidence we have suggests this affinity was more than the political calculation of elites. African Americans from all parts of the country reported that they considered the Jews a people apart, and a potential ally. Their newspapers bemoaned Jews' slaughter in European pogroms and praised their mutual aid societies and their commitment to union organizing. Black women in Harlem gathered baby supplies for refugees of Polish pogroms. The *Amsterdam News* explained such "tender feelings": "only these two [groups] knew what it meant to drink the bitter dregs of race prejudice."¹⁸

Most Jews, in turn, endorsed African American civil rights. Black workers trying to unionize in 1920 looked to the Workmen's Circle and other Jewish groups for help "because the Jews can sympathize and empathize more with them," the *Jewish Daily Forward* believed. "Many of us ourselves were oppressed in Old Russia as the Negroes are in free America. . . . We can understand them better and sound their appeal wide and quickly."¹⁹ Liberal Jews, who interpreted their religion as a universalist call to arms, joined those from even more secularized, frequently socialist, backgrounds, whose stress on internationalism and on class had already led them to a concern for black civil rights.²⁰

Where black and Jewish interests and concerns overlapped, individuals began, tentatively, to cooperate. Agencies followed, more slowly. Over time these contacts broadened into a more committed collaboration between civil rights organizations in the two communities. The economic and political struggles of the 1930s (subject of chapter 2) and World War II (chapter 3), served as the pivots for change. Both the burdens and the possibilities of the age affected African and Jewish Americans profoundly. Government now acknowledged its role in extending equality; liberal organizations could thus win meaningful advances. Each success brought

increased strength and prestige to the groups that won it and encouraged the formation of even more potent political alliances. Meanwhile, developments in Europe underlined the dangers of fascism and the real—and horrific—implications of racism. And the incarceration of Japanese Americans in internment camps revealed that it could happen here. Thus the benefits of cooperation and the means to cooperate converged in the postwar years, and an active black and Jewish political partnership was born. This partnership was never seamless, and full unity was never achieved—nor sought. Nonetheless, the number of programs and goals shared by advocacy groups in the two communities had multiplied, and the positive initial experiences of cooperation encouraged the development of more expansive coalitions.

After the war, black and Jewish civil rights agencies spearheaded battles to establish fair employment, fair housing, and anti-Klan legislation; challenge restrictive housing covenants; and dismantle restrictions based on “race, religion, or national origin” in employment, private clubs, and colleges. They worked jointly on educational campaigns to challenge bigotry and promote pluralism. This partnership was concretized in the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (1951), whose two leaders were an African American and a Jew. These organizations also collaborated in challenging restrictions leveled solely against one group or the other. They joined in the fight against segregated schools, transportation, and other public facilities; struggled to lift restrictions on the immigration of refugees; and formed coalitions with other ethnic, racial, religious, and labor groups to promote civil rights and civil liberties. All this is considered in chapter 4.

But this collaboration took place on the institutional level. Many Jews held racist views; few African Americans were immune to anti-Semitism. Although each group encountered discrimination, the experiences of most Jews diverged from those of most African Americans. Anti-Semitism in the United States was almost always less vicious than racism, and it certainly declined more quickly. Jews might be restricted from colleges, country clubs, and exclusive neighborhoods, but Jim Crow was an indignity and an economic barrier Jews never had to endure. Most significantly—and in part this explains the last two observations—almost all Jews were white people. Not only could many Jews therefore “pass,” but social and economic opportunities were often based on skin color rather than on ethnicity or religion. Thus Jews’ color and their job skills facilitated mobility into entrepreneurial positions, and into white-collar work generally by the 1940s and ’50s, while most African Americans remained trapped at the bottom of any occupational field they were permitted to enter at all.

In spatial terms, by the 1930s and ’40s upwardly mobile Jews in the North began moving out of neighborhoods—ghettos—that African

Americans had begun moving into, while keeping their jobs, stores, and other real-estate investments there. As their incomes rose, Jewish housewives began hiring African Americans as domestics, and Jewish businesses hired black employees. In the South, Jews opened or expanded businesses in an otherwise barely entrepreneurial region, serving the local black as well as white population. Thus, precisely at the time that Jewish and black civil rights organizations began to reach out to each other, Jews had also become landlords, rental agents, social workers, teachers, employers, and shopkeepers in black communities. For the masses of blacks and Jews, then, relations took place in interchanges where Jews generally held greater power.

By the early 1940s, these entrepreneurial and class tensions threatened to derail the fragile coalition, and black and Jewish agencies therefore set out explicitly to address them. African Americans demanded that Jewish groups intervene with Jewish businesses to stop exploitative and racist practices, while Jews lamented black anti-Semitism and defended the Jewish record regarding black civil rights. In this way community conflicts surfaced within organizational interactions. Meanwhile, elites in both communities led most of their civil rights organizations. The paternalism those elites could exhibit toward those they sought to help only inflamed feelings further.²¹ The actions and responses of both sides reveal the deep fissures that class tensions created within an otherwise productive collaboration; these issues are explored alongside organizational developments in the book's first four chapters.²²

Despite these tensions—or more accurately, helping to fuel them—both blacks and Jews shared the presumption that Jews would treat blacks more fairly than other whites would, because of the shared bond they both perceived in their historical experience of oppression. This enhanced mutual expectations that common cause might be made and was important for the forging of political ties. But while genuinely felt, the claim of black and Jewish kinship through suffering, made by both blacks and Jews, also obscured racial and class differences between the two communities and created unrealistically high expectations on both sides. When these expectations were disappointed, as in cases of economic strife, and when that mutual support weakened in later decades (the subject of chapter 6), the bitterness and recriminations proved particularly difficult to handle. Here, then, was the irony of the “golden age” of black-Jewish collaboration. That period of cooperation did indeed produce remarkable progress in civil rights. But at the same time it was wracked by tensions that constrained collaboration and prefigured the later collapse of mutual purpose.

Before proceeding with that story, however, chapter 5 pauses to explore liberal black and Jewish agencies' responses to anticommunism, crucial

for understanding the relationship between American liberalism and black-Jewish relations. The postwar liberalism of pluralism, integration, and civil equality was always tempered by the cold war and the awareness that just beyond our borders, and even within them, lay direct threats to the American Way of Life. This was the era of the (second) Red Scare, colloquially known as McCarthyism after its most famous instigator.

Black and Jewish organizations found themselves enmeshed in a contradiction. On the one hand, most considered communism an ideology antithetical to the values of democracy, individual freedom, and entrepreneurial capitalism they embraced. On the other hand, many avid anticommunists were also racists and anti-Semites, painting civil rights organizations as subversive foreign agents bent on overthrowing American civilization. Both to protect their own programs and to defend the civil liberties necessary to a liberal democracy, black and Jewish organizations simultaneously proclaimed their own anticommunism and challenged the more draconian pieces of anticommunist legislation. They narrowed their conception of equality from *human* rights to *civic* rights while they campaigned on behalf of those rights even when accused of disloyalty. These contradictions shaped black-Jewish relations, liberalism, and the civil rights movement as surely as did economics and racial politics, and their implications are explored at some length before we return in chapter 6 to the chronological narrative.

The class tensions between most blacks and Jews that had long threatened their political collaboration intensified with the mass action of the 1960s. Jews' greater success in achieving middle-class status made them hesitant to employ confrontational tactics and aroused their suspicion of outspoken black leaders. And to some extent, blacks and Jews began to diverge in their goals. If the desire for liberal civil rights legislation promoted a "grand alliance," the struggle to define true equality and determine methods of enforcement spurred its unraveling.

This difference of views became public in the 1978 affirmative action case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, when black and Jewish agencies, disagreeing over the policy's approaches and mechanisms, took opposing sides. But the decline in cooperation predated *Bakke*, spurred by several failures of liberals in the previous decade to live up to their stated civil rights commitments. Those failures provoked an increasing nationalism and militancy within the black community, which increased fear and resentment among Jews. Both turned inward and away from coalition. Or at least it seemed that way, as the diatribes of black anti-Semites and the neoconservatism of many Jews dominated public discussion of black-Jewish relations by the 1980s.

But it is not that simple, chapter 6 suggests. Once again, the contradictions and ambiguities of the multiple black-Jewish stories make such gen-

eralizations impossible. I argue that neither black-Jewish relations nor black and Jewish liberalism are in as much decline as current wisdom has it. The book concludes with a look at the election of 2000, notable for (among other things) two striking black-Jewish moments.

Facile claims about the ending of a black-Jewish political partnership because of black extremism or Jewish self-serving manipulation miss the complexity and drama of the civil rights struggle. If there is a tragedy in the weakening of black-Jewish ties it is ultimately not about blacks or Jews, but rather about the loss of momentum in the struggle for justice. Perhaps a clearer understanding of both the real limits and noblest goals of the black-Jewish relationship can help forge a new, broader partnership. And perhaps understanding the limits of liberalism in a racialized state can help liberalism become truer to its own ideals.