

BLACK

Intellectuals Embrace Anti-Semitism

A WORRYING TREND IS EMERGING

By Rafael Medoff

Many Jewish organizations and news media outlets have been focused on the activities of anti-Semitic white supremacists, and some pundits even have accused President Donald Trump of encouraging such bigots. But in recent months, the most significant anti-Semitism in America actually has been emanating from a very different source: African-American intellectuals.

A number of America's most prominent black thinkers, writers, and political activists are blaming Jews for the slave trade and climate change, accusing liberal Jewish organizations of being secretly racist, and publicly praising notorious anti-Semites such as the Rev. Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam movement.

It's a startling trend that could reshape our understanding of contemporary anti-Semitism in America in the years ahead.



ROOTS OF BLACK ANTI-SEMITISM

American Jews have played a significant role in assisting the African-American community throughout the past century. Jews played a central part in creating the NAACP (in 1909) and similar organizations. Jewish philanthropists built more than 5,000 schools for rural African Americans from 1914 to 1932. And many thousands of Jews were active in the black civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, including at least half of the movement's volunteer attorneys.

Despite that record of Jewish assistance, a streak of anti-Semitism has always infected the African-American community, says Dr. Harold Brackman, a historian of Jewish-black relations and consultant to the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Brackman told *Ami* that American Jews and blacks initially worked together in the struggle against racial oppression, but then

black anti-Semitism emerged, as many African Americans “no longer want to play secondary roles to Jewish patrons and sponsors.”

Going back to the 1800s, black churches often propagated standard Protestant religious canards against Jews and Judaism. Early black folklore—which was popularized in the mainstream American black press—was filled with stories in which Jews appeared as thieves, liars, or economic exploiters.

Many widely-admired African-American figures in the early 1900s harbored hostility toward Jews. Educator Booker T. Washington, the most prominent black leader prior to World War I, was, according to his biographer, “full of misunderstandings about Jews”—even though Washington’s famous Tuskegee Institute had many Jewish financial backers.

Historian W.E.B. Du Bois, in his classic 1903 book *Souls of Black Folk*, railed against “shrewd and unscrupulous Russian Jews” who supposedly exploited black farmers in the South. Later in life, Du Bois would renounce his earlier anti-Semitism, but much damage was done in the meantime.

Author and speaker Marcus Garvey, leader of a Harlem-based black nationalist movement in the 1920s, admired the Nazis and blamed “the Jewish judge and the Jewish prosecutor” when he was convicted of mail fraud in 1923. Garvey often quoted from the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Such anti-Semitic rabble-rousing likely added fuel to the fire when riots exploded in Harlem in March 1935. Aroused by false rumors about the beating of a shoplifter, African-American mobs targeted Jewish



stores as they rampaged through Harlem, smashing windows and looting. More than 200 stores were attacked during the night-long violence.

NEW VOICES OF HATE

Today, American Jewry faces a new generation of African-American intellectuals who harbor anti-Semitic sentiments. In recent weeks, their anti-Jewish proclamations have rivaled the white supremacist anti-Semitism that has been the focus of so much news media coverage.

The voice that has attracted the most attention is that of Tamika Mallory, co-

founder of the massive Women’s March on Washington. Last week, Mallory was the subject of a front-page *New York Times* article which described how she forced a Jewish colleague, Vanessa Wruble, out of the movement’s leadership because she was not a “person of color.”

Wruble told the *Times* that at the founding meeting of the Women’s March, Mallory demanded that Wruble “confront the role of Jews in racism.” Mallory, who acknowledged that the conversation took place, told the *Times*’ reporter that although Jews are targeted by white supremacists, “white Jews, as white people, uphold supremacy.”

Wruble added that in the first meeting, Mallory also insisted “that Jewish people played a large role in the slave trade and the prison industry.” Surprised and confused by the verbal barrage, Wruble thought to herself, “Maybe there are things I don’t know about my own people.” But after doing a little research, she quickly realized that Mallory’s accusations were based on anti-Semitic conspiracy theories circulated by Rev. Louis Farrakhan and his Nation of Islam.

Wruble told the *Times* that “she did not want to dwell on the issue because she wanted to work together on the [first] march,” which took place in January 2017. But in the face of continuing anti-Semitism by Mallory and other Women’s March leaders, and after learning that Mallory had

THOUSANDS OF JEWS WERE ACTIVE IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF THE '50S AND '60S, INCLUDING AT LEAST HALF OF THE VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS.



been hiring Nation of Islam strongmen to provide security for their events, Wruble left to start a new group, called “March On.”

The allegation concerning Jews and the transatlantic slave trade is “a monumental lie,” Dr. Eunice Pollack, author of *Racializing Anti-Semitism: Black Militants, Jews, and Israel, 1950--Present*, told *Ami*. She coauthored a 1995 resolution, adopted by the American Historical Association, along with a statement which concluded that such “claims so misrepresent the historical record...that we believe them only to be part of a long anti-Semitic tradition that presents Jews as negative central actors in human history.”

MARCHES CANCELED

Repercussions are already being felt over the anti-Semitism of the Women’s March leaders and their support for Farrakhan.

The National Organization for Women (NOW), one of America’s most prominent feminist groups, announced that in response to the march leadership’s anti-Semitism, NOW will “withhold direct financial support [for the march] until the questions regarding leadership are resolved.”

Meanwhile, the organizers of planned Women’s Marches in Chicago and New Orleans have announced they are canceling their protests. The Louisiana activists said that because of the controversy over anti-Semitism in their national leadership, local efforts to “fundraise, enlist involvement [and]

find sponsors and attendees have drastically declined this year.” A campaign to raise \$12,000 for sound systems and other expenses related to the New Orleans march netted just \$600 over the past several months.

The New Orleans announcement also revealed that “many of the sister marches have

asked the [national] leaders of Women’s March, Inc. to resign, but as of today, they have yet to do so.”

Women’s March activists in Humboldt County, in Northern California, have announced that they, too, will cancel their planned march—but for a different reason: they said their problem was that the attendees at their previous protests were “overwhelmingly white” and they need time to do “more outreach” to non-whites.

SHARPTON’S DISCIPLE

Before Women’s March leader Tamika Mallory became an admirer of Louis Farrakhan, she was a follower of another anti-Semitic black preacher, Rev. Al Sharpton. Mallory’s parents were founding members of Sharpton’s National Action Network (NAN).

Mallory herself became active in NAN at the age of 11. She was a teenage activist in Sharpton’s movement in 1991, when he helped incite the pogrom in Crown Heights with his ravings about “Jewish diamond dealers” and his accusation that Hatzalah is an “apartheid ambulance service.” Mallory was still active in 1995, when Sharpton incited the anti-Jewish riot at Freddy’s Fashion Mart, in Harlem.

“Rev. Al Sharpton groomed, shaped and taught her about the importance of commitment and mentored her,” *The Amsterdam*

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News, a leading black newspaper, reported in 2011, when Mallory, at age 28, was appointed executive director of Sharpton's organization.

In a subsequent interview with the newspaper, Mallory said: "I owe a lot to NAN for giving me the opportunity to develop as a leader and professional. Rev. Sharpton saw something in me I didn't see in myself. He allowed me to lead, and I will be supportive of him. He is my leader."

Mallory first attracted notice in the Jewish community last year, when she launched a bizarre attack on the Anti-Defamation League. The ADL was one of several civil rights groups that was chosen by Starbucks to provide diversity training to its employees after an incident in Philadelphia in which a branch manager asked police to remove two African American men who were sitting in the shop but not ordering anything.

Mallory publicly demanded that the ADL be excluded from the diversity training, because the ADL is, she claimed, "constantly attacking black and brown people." Starbucks quickly agreed to Mallory's demand.

After that episode, Jewish journalists began paying closer attention to Mallory's Facebook page and Instagram account. There they found that Mallory has been attending Rev. Farrakhan's speeches and posting photos of herself embracing the Nation of Islam leader. In one of her postings, she called the anti-Semitic black Muslim leader "the Greatest Of All Time."

Mallory has also unleashed numerous verbal assaults against Israel. In one posting, she called the establishment of Israel "a human rights crime." In another, she said Israel's policy is to "kill, steal, and do whatever it is you're gonna do to take that land."

FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA

Hatred of Israel likewise was the motivation when CNN commentator and Temple University professor Marc Lamont Hill spoke at an event marking the UN's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in November. Hill is a prominent African-

American activist who describes himself on his website as "one of the leading intellectual voices in the country."

At the UN event, Hill called for "the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea." That slogan, referring to the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, is a longtime Arab war cry summarizing the goal of destroying Israel.

Amidst the ensuing outcry, CNN announced that it would no longer employ Hill as an on-air commentator. However, some media sources said that CNN had already been planning to dismiss Hill because of other extremist comments he has made in recent months.

The latest controversy prompted fresh scrutiny of Prof. Hill's tweets over the past few years, and it turned out that he has quite

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a record of bashing Israel. For example, in a 2017 tweet, he said it was "offensive & counterproductive" for the US government to ask the Palestinian Authority to "reject hatred and terrorism."

In other recent tweets, Hill characterized Palestinian Arab terrorism as "Palestinian resistance to settler-colonialism," and he wrote that it is "offensive" to "call on Palestinians to 'behave.'"

In a 2014 tweet, Hill announced, "I oppose occupation of Gaza." He wrote that nine years after Israel withdrew all of its soldiers, and expelled all Jewish residents, from Gaza. He has also publicly supported Rasmia Odeh, a Palestinian Arab convicted of murdering two Hebrew University students. Hill called Odeh "a Palestinian freedom fighter."

Hill's activities have gone beyond tweeting. Dr. Charles Small, president of the Institute for the Study of Global Anti-Semitism and Policy, points to Hill's leadership role in the "Ferguson to Palestine" project, which brings young African Americans to visit the Palestinian Authority-controlled territories. "Hill also has been actively spreading the anti-Semitic



trope that American police officers are trained in Israel and come back to the United States intent on killing black men," Small told *Ami*

Dr. Small also notes that Hill, like Tamika Mallory of the Women's Movement, has been connected to Farrakhan's Nation of Islam for a number of years. In 2016, Hill posted a photo of himself with Farrakhan, both of them smiling, with this caption: "Been blessed to spend the last day with Minister Louis Farrakhan. An amazing time of learning, listening, and even head nodding to music."

In an interview with the Nation of Islam's newspaper, *The Final Call*, in October, Hill said: "Do I believe that [Farrakhan] is an anti-Semite? No."

Farrakhan has been described by the ADL as "the leading anti-Semite in America." The left-of-center Southern Poverty Law Center characterizes Farrakhan as "an anti-Semite who routinely accuses Jews of manipulating the US government." The Center classifies the Nation of Islam as a hate group.

A POET'S PREJUDICE

Alice Walker is a prominent member of the African-American literary elite. She is a poet and author who won a Pulitzer Prize.

Walker is also an anti-Semite, but until recently, nobody seemed to notice.

In December, Walker was chosen to be included in a feature in *The New York Times* book review section, in which famous authors were asked, "What books are on your nightstand?" She named four. One was *And the Truth Shall Set You Free*, by David Icke. Walker explained: "In Icke's books there is the whole of existence, on this planet and several others, to think about. A curious person's dream come true."

But Icke is a notorious conspiracy theorist and the 491-page book which Walker praised

is wildly anti-Semitic. In it, Ickes claims that "a small Jewish clique" worked "with non-Jews to create the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Second World War." Icke also writes that the Holocaust was "coldly calculated by the 'Jewish' elite," and he repeatedly cites the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

In other writings, Icke has claimed that he is divine and that the world is secretly run by a race of child-sacrificing lizard people, many of whom are Jewish. (This is not a joke.) Icke is a former professional soccer player.

The New York Times was criticized by the Anti-Defamation League and others for publishing Walker's endorsement of Icke. *Times* Book Review editor Pamela Paul responded, "When we interview anyone, whether it's a public official or a foreign leader or an artist, *The Times* isn't saying that we approve of the person's views and actions."

It turns out that Walker has been praising Icke for many years, but the media never took an interest. In a 2012 blog post, for example, Walker hailed Icke for "the freedom of his mind," compared him favorably to Malcolm X, and recommended videos of his lectures. And in an interview with the BBC in 2013, Walker chose another Icke book, *Human Race Get Off Your Knees*, as the one book she would want to have with her on a desert island. In that book, Icke presented his theory that the minds of human beings are controlled by creatures on the moon.

"Walker and *The New York Times* are directly responsible for taking Icke from the fringe and moving him into the mainstream," Dr. Small told *Ami*. "They have given him unprecedented publicity, guaranteeing that he will sell many more books and spread his anti-Semitic ideas much further than before."

NOT BUDGING

Despite widespread criticism of her embrace of Icke, Walker has refused to budge. Replying to her critics, she hailed Icke for being "brave enough to ask the questions others fear to ask," and denied that Ickes is an anti-Semite. Walker wrote that she and Ickes were victims of "an attempt to frighten

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people into lying about what is on their nightstand.”

Icke, for his part, said the criticism of his books was “propaganda against me designed to discredit me,” and reiterated his allegation that “some Jewish people are involved in a global conspiracy.

Walker’s own comments on Jews and Israel are particularly revealing. Last year, she wrote a poem on her website that was full of anti-Semitic vitriol.

In a follow-up news article about the Walker controversy last week, the *Times* reported: “While Ms. Walker’s views were no secret, they hadn’t been subject to such intense public scrutiny before.” The author of the article, Alexandra Alter, did not explain why she and her *Times* colleagues had never scrutinized Walker’s writings about Jews before.

Very few of Walker’s political allies or literary colleagues have spoken out against her defense of Icke, or her anti-Semitic poem. “Many white progressives remain resistant to the notion that African-American intellectuals can be truly anti-Semitic,” Dr. Brackman, of the Wiesenthal Center, told *Ami*. “They seem to believe that African Americans can’t be prejudiced against Jews because they are immune to racism by virtue of their status as an ‘oppressed minority.’”

BLAMING THE ROTHSCHILDS

Several prominent African-American political figures have also been entangled in anti-Semitism controversies in recent months.

After a surprise snow flurry last March, Washington, DC Councilman Trayon White posted a video on his Facebook page in which he blamed the Rothschilds for the weather. “Man, it just started snowing out of nowhere this morning, man. Y’all better pay attention to this climate control, man, this climate manipulation,” he declared. “And DC keep talking about, ‘We a resilient city.’ And that’s a model based off the Rothschilds controlling the climate to create natural disasters they can pay for to own the cities, man. Be careful.”



Councilman White, 34, has a degree from the University of Maryland. Believing that White simply needed a little education, local Jewish leaders brought him to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for a tour. But White abruptly left the tour in the middle, and went outside the building to make phone calls.

White’s supporters held a rally to defend him against his critics. One of the featured speakers at the rally was Abdul Khadir Muhammad, a representative of Rev. Louis Farrakhan. In his remarks, Muhammad called Jews “termites” and denounced a Jewish DC councilwoman, Elissa Silverman, as “a fake Jew.” Ironically, Silverman had just invited White to attend her Pesach Seder.

Subsequently White was exposed as having taken \$500 from his campaign fund and donated it to Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam.

JEWES AND GENTRIFICATION

Meanwhile, an African American New York State assemblywoman from Brooklyn, Diane Richardson, exploded against Jews during a local public meeting called to discuss problems associated with gentrification. When a neighborhood official complained about people who “constantly ring her doorbell to ask if she’s interested in selling her home,”

Assemblywoman Richardson burst out, “It must be Jewish people.”

In her remarks, Assemblywoman Richardson also made a sneering reference to Brooklyn State Senator Simcha Felder as “the Jewish senator from southern Brooklyn.” Former New York City Councilmember Lew Fidler said Richardson’s statements were “offensive” and “dripping with anti-Semitism.”

Responding to criticism of her remarks, Richardson insisted she was “tired and sleep-deprived.” She apologized, but also claimed that her words were “misconstrued.”

The most troubling recent episode involving an African-American political activist concerns James Polite. He was arrested in November after he was seen on security cameras setting fire to seven *shuls* and *yeshivos* in Williamsburg. Polite has also been charged with painting the words “Die Jew Rats” and “Hitler” on the walls of a Reform synagogue in the Prospect Heights neighborhood.

Yet Polite is not a stereotypical anti-Semitic street thug. He is a Brandeis University graduate and was a full-time intern for former New York City Council speaker Christine Quinn, one of the most powerful Democratic politicians in the city.

Polite was a volunteer in Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign, and met Speaker Quinn at an Obama election rally on the steps

of City Hall. In addition to serving as an intern for Quinn, he worked on both her 2009 re-election race and her unsuccessful campaign for mayor in 2013.

News media coverage of Polite's arrest emphasized that he grew up in foster care, and was taking medication for bipolar disorder. The implication was that his actions were motivated by mental health issues, not anti-Semitism. Speaker Quinn told the *Times* that Polite made anti-Semitic remarks "when he was off his medications."

IDENTITY POLITICS

Dr. Brackman, of the Wiesenthal Center, believes that African-American intellectual anti-Semitism is related, at least in part, to the rise of identity politics. He told *Ami* that the recent tendency of groups on the political left to make racial affiliations the focus of individuals' identity has encouraged African Americans to sever traditional alliances with Jews and even embrace anti-Jewish hostility.

Dr. Eunice Pollack agrees that anti-Semitism among black intellectuals is increasing and is related to identity politics. Some of these intellectuals have "forged new identities that rely heavily on the theme of denigrating Jews," she told *Ami*. "They have embraced a paradigm that characterizes Jews, their erstwhile closest allies and benefactors, as leading imperialists and exploiters—the latest variant of the old anti-Semitic trope of Jews as blood-suckers."

Brackman says that in the past, "Bible-based

philo-Semitism"—positive images of Jews based on stories from the Bible—"served as a counterpoint" to anti-Semitic tendencies in the African-American community. But with the general decline of religious affiliation in American society, that counterpoint has become less effective.

Dr. Brackman is not convinced that African-American intellectuals are "predominantly anti-Semitic." It may be that those who are anti-Semitic are simply attracting more attention than the silent majority who are not, in his view. "Still," he told *Ami*, "I have to admit that, today, powerful African-American voices against anti-Semitism are few, mostly conservative, and not listened to."

Dr. Charles Small, of the Institute for the Study of Global Anti-Semitism and Policy, points to another factor: the frequent anti-Semitic comments by African-American rap music artists and sports celebrities such as basketball star LeBron James, who just last week tweeted derisive remarks about "Jewish money." "Celebrities like James have an outsized role in the black community and therefore their remarks about Jews are especially harmful," Small told *Ami*.

Prof. Stephen H. Norwood of the University of Oklahoma, who has done extensive research on anti-Semitic violence in the United States in the 1940s, is concerned about the factors that could lead to a recurrence of such assaults. "American anti-Semitic attacks reached a peak during World War II, when street beatings of Jews—often resulting in severe injury and even disfigurement—and damage to Jewish stores were a major occurrence in Boston and many parts of New York City," Norwood told *Ami*. "Sizeable numbers of Jews found it impossible to carry on their normal religious, business, or social activities."

Prof. Norwood, who is the author of the recent book *Anti-Semitism and the American Far Left*, expressed concern that the recent verbal attacks on Jews by prominent African-American figures could provide an intellectual justification for new outbreaks. "We know from history that anti-Jewish slanders can move all too easily from the realm of rhetoric to something far worse," he said. □

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