

ON THE FRONTLINES OF FAITH

*The Historical and Spiritual Bonds Between
African-Americans and Jews*



By Dr. Edward L. Branch



International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews®

On the Frontlines of Faith: The Historic and Spiritual Bonds Between African-Americans and Jews

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International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews®

*How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

— Psalm 133:1

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ON THE FRONTLINES OF FAITH

Prologue

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s was one of the pivotal events of the 20th century. It focused upon the citizen rights of black people in America who suffered beneath the heavy load of racism and oppression. Negroes, as we were called at that time, were second-class citizens, although the laws of the land provided for equal rights to everyone.

Even with laws in place, Negroes were still denied the rights to fair housing, jobs, and many of the rights that belonged to them as citizens of this country. There were public restrooms and drinking fountains upon which signs were placed denoting “Whites Only” and “Coloreds Only.” Segregation in public transportation was widespread throughout the South where white people rode at the front of the bus while black people rode in the back.



Restaurants, hotels, and numerous other businesses could — and would — often deny service to Negroes simply based upon the color of their skin. Local governments supported this treacherous system by refusing to honor laws granting equal rights and often allowed the white perpetrators to get away with crimes against Negroes without any reprisal at all.

Lynchings and burnings of crosses were known to be the practices of some white supremacist organizations like the Klu Klux Klan, who with blatant determination, vowed to keep America pure white at all costs. News of black leaders being savagely beaten or lynched or otherwise killed was almost common place.

A Movement Is Born

It was against this backdrop of an oppressive and hate-filled environment that the Civil Rights Movement arose. While there were efforts that proceeded what is generally referred to as the civil rights era to overcome these bitter conditions, it was not until the early 1950s that any national organized strategies were employed. The emergence of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. marked the beginning of an era that would change things in America forever.

But it took an African-American woman to ignite the movement. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery (Alabama) bus and was arrested. When the Montgomery Improvement Association was formed, they sought leadership from the new pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired, but that is not true... No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”

— Rosa Parks

The arrest and conviction of Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery bus boycott. The boycott, which began a few days later on December 5, 1955, was successful, leaving numbers of city buses sitting idle while Negroes rode in taxis owned by other Negroes, or walked, as many of them chose to do. Some walked as far as 20 miles each day.

Later, when Rosa Parks was asked why she refused to give up her seat, she said in her own words, “People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired, but that is not true. I was

not old, although some people have an image of me being old then. I was 42. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”

The Montgomery bus boycott led to numerous protests of the segregated conditions in and around Montgomery and soon spread to other cities across the South. Sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and numerous other activities sprouted from the racism and oppression felt by black people during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

With the rise of new organizations opposing segregation and the renewed focus of existing ones, protest marches became a part of the general strategy to bring the vicious and vile treatment of Negroes to the forefront in America. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), led by Roy Wilkins, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), then led by Dr. King, and several other groups were on the frontlines of the movement. However, the struggle for freedom was bigger than those individuals or organizations who headlined it.



“At the Side”

Included among those who joined in the fight for freedom were people of other races and ethnicities. The problem of civil rights for Negroes was one that affected many, including white people, who believed in justice and equality so deeply that they risked themselves for its sake. On March 25, 1965, Dr. King led thousands of demonstrators from Selma, Alabama to the state capitol in Montgomery where the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had been campaigning for voting rights.

“There was never a moment in American history more honorable and inspiring than the pilgrimage of...every race and faith pouring into Selma to face danger at the side of its embattled Negroes.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

It was to the crowd gathered at the conclusion of the march that Dr. King said, “There was never a moment in American history more honorable and inspiring than the pilgrimage of clergymen and laymen of every race and faith pouring into Selma to face danger at

the side of its embattled Negroes.” Dr. King’s emphasis on the fact that other races and religions were present is worthy of discussion.

We do not know, however, we are free to speculate on how effective the movement might have been without the presence and support of our brothers and sisters of other races and religions. The frontlines of the movement included numbers of others who were passionate and determined to once and for all settle the race issue in America by standing up for freedom and justice. While it was the civil rights of Negroes at the center of the struggle of the 1950s and 60s, freedom and justice was everybody’s business. It took courage and strength for Negroes to take a stand for justice and equality on their own behalf; it took that and more for those who did not benefit directly from the struggle to stand, as Dr. King stated, “at the side” of Negroes.

On the Frontlines of Faith

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was one of those who took to the frontlines of the struggle for freedom during the Civil Rights Movement. Who was this bearded man with rimmed glasses and a staunch appearance, who on occasion was arm-in-arm with Dr. King on the frontlines?



Rabbi Heschel (January 11, 1907–December 23, 1972) was one of the most influential religious figures of the 20th century. Born in Warsaw, Poland, he received his Ph.D. from the University of Berlin in 1933. He was a scholar, theologian, activist, poet, historian and author; he was a religious teacher “in the prophetic tradition.”

He may be best known for the iconic photograph of him marching with Dr. King



in Selma in 1965. He later said, “I felt my legs were praying.” Rabbi Heschel wrote ten books, including *“Man in Search of God,”* *“The Sabbath”* and others. He was professor of Jewish Ethics at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York City after serving as an instructor at Cincinnati’s Hebrew College for five years.

According to one source, the Jewish communities of the South were rather small. The majority of Jews who migrated from Europe occupied the larger cities of the North, like New York or Chicago.

*Our Jewish brothers and sisters
have consistently been
“at the side”
of the black community.*

— Dr. E.L. Branch

Most southern Jews remained quiet and stayed out of the public square during this season of controversy over racial equality. Other southern Jews were frightened to put themselves on the line and preferred neutrality. And, of course, there were pockets of Jews, as there were of blacks, who disagreed with the movement entirely. However, with support from northern Jews, the voice of the Jewish community was heard loud and clear.

If anyone were to ask the question, “Where was the Jewish community during the Civil Right Movement?” the response would come loud and clear, “They were on the frontlines of faith.”

Our Jewish brothers and sisters have consistently been “at the side” of the black community. According to an article published by the Religious Action Center:

American Jews played a significant role in the founding and funding of some of the most important civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Leadership Conference on

Civil and Human Rights, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1909, Henry Moscowitz joined W.E.B. DuBois and other civil rights leaders to found the NAACP. Kivie Kaplan, a vice chairman of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism), served as the national president of the NAACP from 1966 to 1975. Arnie Aronson worked with A. Philip Randolph and Roy Wilkins to found the Leadership Conference.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Jewish activists represented a disproportionate number of those who were involved in the struggle. Jews made up half of the young people who participated

***“...morally
speaking...
some are guilty,
but all are
responsible.”***

— Rabbi Abraham
Joshua Heschel

in the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964. Leaders of the Reform Movement were arrested with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1964 after a challenge to racial segregation in public accommodations. Most famously, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched arm-in-arm with Dr. King in his 1965 March on Selma.

One of my favorite quotes from Rabbi Heschel says, “...morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.”

Everyone's Neighbor

We need not look far to discover the participation and presence of the Jewish community in the Civil Rights Movement. Back on August 28, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, attended by more than 300,000 souls, was on the way.

It was a hot day. Author Taylor Branch, in his book, *“Parting the Waters,”* described the day as such:

Mounted in the eagle’s eye of the Washington Monument, a CBS television camera showed viewers a thick carpet of people on both sides of the half-mile reflecting pool and all around the base of the Lincoln Memorial. At noon, nearly two hours before the rally began, the police estimated the crowd at more than 200,000. From this official number, friendly observers argued plausibly that late arrivals and high density justified



talk of 300,000, and the usual effusions ran it upwards to 500,000. By whatever count, the numbers reduced observers to monosyllabic joy. (p. 377)

Archbishop Patrick O’Boyle of Washington, D.C. was scheduled to give the invocation along with numbers of other speakers who would have their once-in-a-lifetime chance to address this audience, and for that matter, the nation and the world. Among those speaking that day was John Lewis (SNCC), James Farmer (CORE), Walter Reuther (AFL-CIO), Whitney Young (National Urban League), Roy Wilkins (NAACP), and Dr. King (SCLC). Also included to speak on that day, before this massive crowd was Rabbi Joachim Prinz, president of the American Jewish Congress. Here’s a few lines from his speech:

I speak to you as an American Jew. As Americans we share the profound concern of millions of people about the shame and disgrace of inequality and injustice which makes mockery of the great American idea. As Jews we bring to this great demonstration, in which thousands of us proudly participate, a twofold experience — one of the spirit and one of our history. In the realm of the spirit, our fathers taught us thousands of years ago that when God created man, He created him as everybody’s

“...when God created man, He created him as everybody’s neighbor.”

— Rabbi Joachim Prinz

neighbor. Neighbor is not a geographic term. It is a moral concept. It means our collective responsibility for the preservation of man’s dignity and integrity.

From our Jewish historic experience of three and a half thousand years we say: Our ancient history began with slavery and the yearning for freedom. During the Middle Ages, my people lived for a thousand years in the ghettos of Europe. Our

modern history began with a proclamation of emancipation. It is for these reasons that it is not merely sympathy and compassion for the black people of America that motivates us. It is above all and beyond all such sympathies and emotions a sense of complete identification and solidarity born out of our own painful historic experience.

Rabbi Prinz continued:

When I was a rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence. A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers.

*“...the most
disgraceful,
the most
shameful
and the most
tragic problem
is silence.”*

— Rabbi Joachim Prinz

They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality, and in the face of mass murder. America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent, not merely black America, but all of America. It must speak up and act, from the President down to the humblest of us, and not for the sake of the Negro, not for the sake of the black community, but for the sake of the image, the idea, and aspiration of America itself.

A Shared History

If any people could connect with and identify with the plight of black people in America, it's our Jewish brothers and sisters, who, as Rabbi Prinz said, possess a history of slavery, oppression, ghettos, hate and depravation. Rabbi Prinz was purposeful in announcing the presence of thousands of Jews who were in attendance at the March on Washington. He highlighted the fact that the presence and support of the Jews for the cause of freedom was bigger than what meets the eye.

For the Jews present and others who supported the cause, there was “complete identification and solidarity.” I was moved by the Rabbi’s words on silence. There was a serious indictment of America in those words. An indictment that reaches through time and space to any and all who choose to remain aloof and detached in the face of injustice. It was a wake-up call.

To further respond to the question of “where were the Jews during the Civil Rights Movement?” we can revisit the interview of Dr. King that was published in *Playboy* magazine by Alex Haley. In it Dr. King paid homage to the many Jews who had sacrificed greatly for the cause of civil rights. The original text comes from that landmark interview, January 1965.

Dr. King states:

How could there be anti-Semitism among Negroes when our Jewish friends have demonstrated their commitment to the principle of tolerance and brotherhood not only in the form of sizable contributions, but in many other tangible ways, and often at great personal sacrifice? Can we ever express our appreciation to the rabbis who chose to give moral witness with us in St. Augustine, during our recent protest against

segregation in that unhappy city? Need I remind anyone of the awful beating suffered by Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld of Cleveland when he joined the civil rights workers there in Hattiesburg, Mississippi? And who can ever forget the sacrifice of two Jewish lives, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, in the swamps of Mississippi? It would be impossible to record the contribution that the Jewish people have made toward the Negro's struggle for freedom – it has been so great.



Dr. King recognized the presence, support, and sacrifices of our Jewish brothers and sisters during the movement. He knew of those with whom he held hands and locked arms. Dr. King remembered the Jews who marched alongside him and numerous others, whether it was in Alabama, Mississippi, or in Chicago. Dr. King honored those Jews who gave their lives for the cause of freedom and justice. If we were to ask Dr. King, where the Jews were during the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King would say, "At our side. They were at our side."

Rabbi Marc Schneier wrote in his book, *“Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King Jr. & The Jewish Community,”* (Jewish Lights, Woodstock, VT, 1999):

For the record, the Jewish role in Dr. King’s life and the movement as a whole was substantial. Dr. King counted Jews among his closest allies and he identified strongly with the historic experience of the Jewish people against oppression since the Biblical Exodus.

He further stated that

...the relationship between Dr. King and the Jews was reciprocal. However, the Jewish community’s engagement with the civil rights movement was complex.

The majority of the Jews who went south to help blacks, who demonstrated in their own communities on behalf of civil rights, and who gave money to the Civil Rights Movement were neither rabbis nor Orthodox Jews. Most activist Jews were not religious. They were unaffiliated students, lawyers and others whose activism was based in the Jewish ethos of pursuing justice, according to Rabbi Schneier.

“Dr. King counted Jews among his closest allies and he identified strongly with the historic experience of the Jewish people against oppression...”

— Rabbi Marc Schneier

Our Spiritual Ties

Since the Civil Rights Movement, Jewish activists have continued to support the causes of black America and have maintained close ties with black clergy and the black church. Numbers of local religious organizations have brought together rabbis and pastors from almost every denomination. Personal relationships have been forged and meaningful understandings of life and faith have been at the center of interfaith connections. In the Detroit community, there are a number of local congregations that connect upon some frequency with the Jewish community.

I was blessed to have been invited to preach at the *seder* service for one of our suburban Jewish congregations, Temple Israel, located on Walnut Lake Road in West Bloomfield, Michigan. It was a learning and growing experience for me and our congregation. As you may know, the *seder* service is the primary observance of Passover, focusing on the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. It takes us from slavery to freedom.

I preached from the well-known passage in the Book of the prophet Micah, Chapter 6, verse 8, “He hath shewed thee,

*“...what doth the
Lord require of thee,
but to do justly,
and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly
with thy God?”*

— Micah 6:8 (KJV)

O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (KJV) The service was held outdoors as the sun was setting

toward Sabbath. I shall never forget it and look forward to more fellowships with Temple Israel and Rabbi Josh Bennett.

Several years ago now, a delegation of Baptist pastors, representing the four National Baptist Conventions, traveled to Israel to see firsthand the conditions of threat facing our Jewish brothers and sisters on a daily basis. While there, we visited Sderot, the town nearest the Gaza Strip, only to realize that the citizens of this small community live every day under the threat of missiles fired from so close that every home is required to have a bomb shelter. Being less than a mile away from Gaza, they have only a matter of seconds from the sound of a siren to find safety. At the northern most border with Lebanon, we could easily see that Israeli homes were within striking distance from the wire fence that separated their borders.

In a thousand ways, the history of African-Americans and that of the Jews parallel. Hardly anything in life ties people closer together than the pain of a common struggle. While the Bible gives us the story of the Hebrew/Jewish record, we are ever mindful of our connection as the people of God. We are inextricably interwoven into the human fabric and our plight is determined by how well we live and work together. Dr. King said it well when he reminded us that “We will either live together as brothers [and sisters], or we will perish together as fools.”

*“We will either
live together
as brothers
[and sisters],
or we will
perish together
as fools. ”*

— Dr. Martin Luther
King Jr.

A Call to Action

When duty calls, we must not be found idle, or worse, hiding. We must take our rightful places on the frontlines of faith. Our true strength is best shown when we stand together, arm-in-arm, against the evils of injustice and fight for the rights of every person to live out the fullness of their God-given potential with dignity and honor.

We can continue to add strength to the frontlines of faith by opening ourselves to learn about Israel and the Jewish heritage. While this same call goes to learning about other people's groups and religions in general, we should learn as much as we can about our Jewish brothers and sisters in particular. For Christians, Judaism is at the root of our faith and practice. We should also visit Israel. Our lives change forever for the better after a visit to the land of the Bible. The word of God opens and unfolds and blooms in us, as we see bodies of water and acres of land and hills and ridges in the Holy Land.

Our true strength is best shown when we stand together, arm-in-arm, against the evils of injustice.

— Dr. E.L. Branch

Then, finally, on a more personal and practical level, we can take to the frontlines of faith by building and maintaining authentic friendships with our Jewish brothers and sisters. We can all do better with this one. There's a serious problem when all our friends have similar backgrounds and the same faith as us. We should all have friends who are different from us, who think differently, behave differently, and believe differently. The differences that exist in our friends helps to broaden our perspectives and enlarges our view. Be deliberate about building friendships with our Jewish brothers and sisters because to us, brothers and sisters they are.



Rabbi Heschel and Dr. King met for the first time in January 1963 at the National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago where they were both invited to speak. The two men developed a close friendship that lasted throughout their lives. They were often

spoken of as “kindred spirits,” and were so close that Rabbi Heschel gave words of eulogy at the funeral service of Dr. King.

*The differences
that exist
in our friends
helps to broaden
our perspectives*

— Dr. E.L. Branch

Dr. James Cone, the Charles Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY said, “True conversion rarely occurs without an honest encounter with a victim.” What we need is more and more honest encounters with people whom

we have held suspect and have looked at in ways other than the way we look at ourselves.

Passing the Baton

In this struggle for justice and freedom — and this struggle continues even today — we must remain committed to goodness and righteousness. When the Apostle Paul realized that his life and ministry was nearing an end, he wrote in his second letter to Timothy, *“I fought a good fight ...,”* meaning that he was a fighter in the good fight of faith. Paul was careful to choose to fight on the right side of the battle. He chose to fight on the side of good. He continued, *“I finished my course.”*

What the apostle was saying, in the language of the Isthmian Games of the ancient Greeks, is that “I have run my leg of the race. In essence, someone passed me the baton, and now I must pass the baton on to someone else.” Then he concluded, *“I have kept the faith.”* This was a declaration of faithfulness and perseverance, to which he declared, *“If you keep the faith, the faith will also keep you.”*

Let’s keep fighting for justice and freedom until we eradicate hatred and oppression once and for all. Let us keep the faith on the frontlines together.

In the beautiful words of Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933), Methodist minister and gospel music composer:

*Harder yet may be the fight,
Right may often yield to might,
Wickedness awhile may reign,
Satan’s cause may seem to gain,*

*There is a God that rules above,
With hand of power and heart of love,
If I am right, He'll fight my battle,
I shall have peace someday.*

*I do not know how long 'twill be,
Nor what the future holds for me,
But this I know, if Jesus leads me,
I shall get home someday.*

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.”*

— Psalm 122:6-7

THE HISTORICAL BOND BETWEEN BLACK AND JEWISH LEADERS

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., met Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel at the National Conference on Religion and Race in 1963. Like many others in attendance, Dr. King was inspired by Rabbi Heschel's call to clergymen of all faiths "to do something they had never done before." The two men developed a lasting friendship that was united by suffering and oppression, but also spiritually connected by the teachings of the prophets and a hope for a better tomorrow.

The Selma-to-Montgomery marches were a significant intersection of faith and activism. Yet Rabbi Heschel and Dr. King's bond of brotherhood surpassed the Civil Rights Movement. They worked together to end the oppression of Jews in Soviet Russia and protested the war in Vietnam. Their shared religious beliefs were the embodiment of their political and social viewpoints, and their unique kinship became a touchstone for African-American and Jewish relations.



Rabbi Joachim Prinz and Community Organizers A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin

As a young rabbi in Berlin during the 1930s, Rabbi Joachim Prinz refused to be silent in face of rising discrimination against the Jews. As the Nazis came into power and began stripping Jews of their civil rights, Rabbi Prinz boldly spoke out to encourage the Jewish community to embrace their faith and the value of Judaism. He saved many Jewish lives by encouraging them to leave Germany.



After repeated arrests and constant monitoring, Rabbi Prinz himself immigrated to the United States in 1937. Settling in Newark, New Jersey, he served as the rabbi of Temple B'nai Abraham and later became vice chairman of the World Jewish Congress. He was an active member of the World Zionist Organization and a participant in the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington.



Rabbi Prinz devoted much of his life to the Civil Rights Movement as he began to realize that the ideals of American democracy was a reality not experienced by all of its citizens. He saw the plight of African-Americans and other minority groups in the context of his own experience under the Hitler regime. He spoke from his synagogue about the disgrace of discrimination and joined picket lines across America to protest racial prejudice wherever it existed, from unequal employment to segregated schools and housing.



While serving as president of the American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Prinz represented the Jewish community as an organizer of the March on Washington in August 1963, along with A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and many others.



He spoke immediately before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Rabbi Prinz’s address, based on his experience under Hitler’s Nazi Germany, is remembered most for declaring that “bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence.”

*For Zion’s sake, I will not
keep silent.*

— Isaiah 62:1 (ESV)

Throughout his life, Rabbi Prinz was a champion for justice, embracing the biblical adage, “*For Zion’s sake, I will not keep silent*” (Isaiah 62:1, ESV).

Goodman, Cheney, Schwerner – American Civil Rights Workers

Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, Jewish activists from New York, were trying to register voters in Philadelphia, Mississippi, together with James Earl Chaney, a local African-American civil rights worker, when they were abducted and brutally murdered by members of the Klu Klux Klan on the night of June 21, 1964. The three young men were part of a broader national movement that hoped to begin a voter registration drive in the area, part of the Mississippi Summer Project that became known as Freedom Summer.

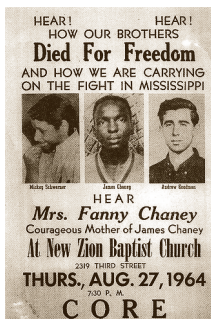
A coalition of civil rights organizations, known as COFO (Council of Federated Organizations), conceived the project where massive numbers of student volunteers would converge on the state to register black voters and conduct “freedom schools.” The schools offered curriculum of black history and arts to children throughout the state.

Schwerner had been inspired to come to Meridian, Mississippi to set up the COFO office because he believed he could help prevent the spread of hate

*Schwerner...believed
he could help prevent
the spread of hate that had
resulted in the Holocaust...*

— Dr. E.L. Branch

that had resulted in the Holocaust, an event that had taken the lives of his family members. Goodman and Schwerner, both members of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), had joined James Chaney as volunteers attempting to register African-Americans to vote when the men were stopped by the Meridian deputy sheriff on their way home from investigating a church bombing in neighboring Neshoba County.



The three were arrested, detained, then released and basically handed over to a KKK mob, who brutally beat Chaney, then shot and killed all three, burned their car, and buried them in a shallow grave.

The disappearance of these activists sparked national outrage and a massive federal investigation. The FBI referred to this investigation as "Mississippi Burning," which, years later, the 1988 film of the same name was loosely based upon.



Black Americans to Support Israel Committee

In April 1975, prominent African-American leaders gathered in New York City at the request of A. Phillip Randolph, a key leader in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, for the formation of an organization for black Americans to demonstrate support for Israel. Thus BASIC was born — Black Americans to Support Israel Committee.

"We are here to express our support for the State of Israel," said Bayard Rustin, executive director of REF (the Randolph Education Fund). "Whenever minorities seek justice, they have to defend democracy. We seek to defend democracy in the Mideast and therefore we support Israel."

Randolph, who noted that American Jewry had always supported the rights of African-Americans, said: "I would like to see the blacks of America register their support for the State of Israel. It will be a crime for anyone, and especially for blacks, not to support the just cause of Israel."

BASIC placed a full-page ad in *The New York Times* on November 23, 1975, which was signed by such influential African-Americans as Lionel Hampton, Hank Aaron, Arthur Ashe, Harry Belafonte, Tom Bradley, Shirley Chisholm, Ralph Ellison, Coretta Scott King, Rosa Parks, Charles Rangel, Percy Sutton, Gardner Taylor, Roy Wilkins, Andrew Young, Julian Bond, Ralph Abernathy, and more than 200 others. ■

Black Americans to Support Israel Committee

The following is a reproduction of an ad in THE NEW YORK TIMES SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1975

"Zionism is not racism, but the legitimate expression of the Jewish people's self-determination. A non-racist 400 year experience with slavery, segregation, and discrimination we know that Zionism is not racism." (From a column by Hajd and Rustin, Director of Black Americans to Support Israel Committee)

We, black Americans, have been guided throughout our long struggle for racial equality by certain fundamental principles. These include:

- a commitment to democracy;
- opposition to all forms of racial, religious and sex discrimination;
- the conviction that denial of equal rights to any minority threatens not only every other minority but democracy itself.

These principles have led us to the following conclusion concerning the Israeli/Arab conflict and its bearings on American society:

1. We condemn the anti-Jewish "blacklist."

We have fought too long and too hard to root out discrimination from our land to sit idly while foreign interests import bigotry into America. Having suffered so greatly from such prejudice, we consider most repugnant efforts by Arab states to use the economic power of their newly acquired oil wealth to boycott business firms that deal with Israel or that have Jewish owners, directors or executives and to import anti-Jewish prejudices from us into this country.

2. We believe blacks and Jews have common interests in democracy and justice.

In the light of greater discrimination, black Americans and American Jews have shared profound and evolving common interests that far transcend any differences between us. Jews through individuals and organizations have been among the most staunch allies in the struggle for racial justice, sharing with us the conviction that equality is inalienable and that no minority is secure in its rights if the rights of any are impaired.

3. We support democratic Israel's right to exist.

The democratic values that have sustained our struggle in America are also the source of our solidarity for Israel and her legitimate national sovereignty. No nation is without imperfections. But Israel's are far out-stripped by the freedom and democratic values. Only in Israel, among the nations of the Middle East, are political freedom and civil liberties secure. All citizens are free and secure in their observance. Education is free and universal. Social welfare is properly advanced. Free communal farms (kibbutzim) are models of social equality, creative innovation, cooperative spirit. Israel's labor movement, the Histadrut, has earned the deep respect of free-labor unions throughout the world.

6. We support genuine Palestinian self-determination.

We support the right of the Palestinians to genuine self-determination, but not at the expense of the rights of Jews to independence and self-determination, and not at the expense of economic blackmarkets or of territories who would force their own "volunteers" at the point of a gun.

We have compassion for all who have suffered in this conflict, not least for the Palestinian refugees, but who can avoid asking who are guilty of these terrible crimes to live in poverty in the midst of Arab wealth?

The spokesman for the goal of self-determination for the Palestinians through the United Nations Human Rights Organization (UNHCR) has been elected. They represent only themselves. The P.L.O. has its tentacles everywhere, has instilled instilling, blackmailing, and who disagree with them. Who can forget the murder of Israeli officers in the Olympic games, the bomb attacks, the airplane hijackings and attacks on the ground, murder massacre of innocent civilians at the Tel Aviv airport?

Regardless of what the Arab world calls it, in the horrific blood of people it is indiscriminate murder of innocents.

Together with other Americans, we enthusiastically join in reaffirming the rights of Israel exist as a sovereign state.

4. Arab oil prices have had disastrous effects upon blacks in America and in Africa.

The impact of the massive increases in the price of oil has fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of black Americans. The we are not alone in our suffering. Millions of men, women, and children in Black Africa face starvation because the economies of their countries, already crippled by drought, were further weakened because of oil price increases. The chief cause of Black Africa's economic economic situation is the price that the Arabs are charging for oil at the same time that they give us the same oil for their own use as "African solidarity." The Arab oil-producing states have offered only small loans to the Black African states, and then only in return for humiliating political concessions.

Israel, small and isolated as it is, has done much to aid the economic development of Black Africa through economic technical programs.

5. We support peace through mutual recognition.

Of our long to see and end to the tragic Arab-Israeli conflict. We have learned from our struggle here in America that the only way to resolve a conflict of animosities is through one of acceptance and reconciliation. The Arabs have refused to accept the legitimacy of the state of Israel. Israel occasionally demonstrated the desire to make concessions in the interest of peace with her Arab neighbors. But she has refused to accept the conditions that would threaten her existence as independent sovereign state.

7. We will work for peace.

In the months ahead we will work for a just and stable peace, a peace that will not be a prelude to a new war but the beginning of an era of cooperation and good will between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

BASIC

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