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FACE TO FACE

Black-Jewish Campus Dialogues

Cherie R. Brown



Every time it happens it hurts, yet it keeps on happening"



Talking about the Holocaust and slavery helps build bridges to each other"

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Cherie R. Brown

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Acknowledgments

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHOSE COMMITMENT to Black Jewish relations made this manual possible. I would like particularly to acknowledge the efforts of Linda Kramer, Toni Fanon, and Rabbi Alan Flamm at Brown University; the chaplains and Afro American centers at Temple, Tufts, and Columbia universities; and Irving M. Levine and Joseph Giordano of the American Jewish Committee. Joyce Duncan and Arlene Allen, my two Black co-trainers, brought their insights and love to the project. Amy Sales worked to develop quantifiable measures to test the effectiveness of the workshops. Ellen Stone edited the material with a unique understanding of Black Jewish issues. Most importantly, I'd like to thank the Black and Jewish students who were so willing to open up and share their deepest feelings and concerns with one another.

C R B

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Foreword

AT A TIME WHEN WE APPEAR to be entering a new stage of ethnic and racial tensions with evidence that the college campus is one of the hot spots it is encouraging that the work outlined in this report effectively answers the plea Don't just stand there do something about the problem

It has been a great source of pride for the American Jewish Committee's Institute for American Pluralism to have sponsored and funded the magnificent work done by Cherie Brown and her associates at the National Coalition Building Institute

Dealing initially with Black Jewish tensions that were exacerbated during the 1984 Presidential election the National Coalition Building Institute with our cooperation has been active on some fifty American campuses in carrying out intergroup relations and prejudice reduction training

While we may have to realistically accept the fact that tensions between racial ethnic and religious groups are normal in a pluralistic society we don't have to sit idly by and watch sparks ignite into fires that are difficult to extinguish

Training an intelligent cadre of young Americans to be secure and positive about their own group identity as well as appreciative of the norms of cultural differences of others is becoming an essential service for our society Healthy advocacy for one's own group in the future will call for less separatism and ethnocentrism and more dialogue ethnic sharing and mastery of the art and science of coalition building This report shows you how to do it

Irving M. Levine
Director
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Introduction

THE SCENE IS A DORMITORY LOUNGE at a prestigious New England university Almost a hundred Black and Jewish students have filed in dripping wet from a spring rain for the fourth in a series of dialogues Now their faces are turned to the front of the room registering thoughtfulness and compassion as they listen intently to the speakers stories A young Jewish woman the daughter of Holocaust survivors tells of the impact of her parents wartime experiences A Black man talks about the time just a few years ago when his high school basketball team's bus was overturned by the opposing team in order to keep him the lone black player out of the game Another student speaks and then another each story unique each conveying a special strength or sensitivity that touches every listener Although the words are painful when the session is over there is buoyancy and hope in this room a sense of growing solidarity and trust between two groups who have discovered common ground

The history of solidarity between Blacks and Jews in the United States goes back well before these students were born They don't remember Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marching arm in arm with the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma Alabama or the Jews who boarded buses headed South to help register Blacks to vote twenty five years ago They have come of age during a different set of social tensions when the fact that Jewish votes are crucial to electing Black big city mayors is less likely to make headlines than the anti-Semitic remarks of Minister Louis Farrakhan Yet if their experience includes tension between Blacks and Jews on campus over Jesse Jackson and the Middle East it also embraces friendship and an unexplained yet undeniable sense of connection To quote one Black student whose comment was not unusual I don't know why but whenever I make friends with whites on campus they almost always turn out to be Jewish

The Black Jewish dialogue program was developed by the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) an organization committed to train

ing ethnic and community leaders in intergroup conflict resolution and coalition building. Based on the principle that honest dialogue is the only way to build lasting and genuine alliances, the program was adopted by the American Jewish Committee during the breach between the Black and Jewish communities caused by the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign. That crisis inspired both Black and Jewish leaders to take a fresh look at a long standing relationship that could no longer be taken for granted. Wounds needed healing in an atmosphere that allowed each group to stand up for its needs while affirming the common goals and experiences that brought them together in the first place. For the more thoughtful members of each community, the breach became an opportunity to forge a new level of understanding and cooperation on both sides.

The American Jewish Committee chose college students as an important target of its efforts at Black Jewish reconciliation for several reasons. Several incidents had made it clear not only that racism and anti-Semitism still existed on campuses but that tensions between Black and Jewish students often mirrored those in the country at large. At Brown University, for example, both the Third World Center and the sukkah at Hillel were vandalized during the 1982-83 academic year. Shortly thereafter, the student newspaper at the University of Pennsylvania became the forum for a heated exchange between Black and Jewish students after it published an article defending Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan's anti-Jewish views. Jesse Jackson's candidacy for president, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the anti-apartheid movement, all hot topics on campuses over the past few years, often became sources of misunderstanding between Black and Jewish students. Meanwhile, occurrences like the vandalism at Brown indicated the need for a strong Black Jewish alliance against racism and anti-Semitism.

The situation presented an exciting opportunity to work with what would likely be the next generation of leaders in the Black and Jewish communities. The AJC commissioned the NCBI to design and conduct a pilot series of workshops on five college campuses: Boston University, Brandeis University, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Temple University, and Brown University. Initial contact was made with directors of Hillel programs and Third World centers, as well as other administrators and faculty who would be able to recruit participants. Before long, a core of Black and Jewish students on each campus was meeting to share some very personal feelings and experiences and to explore the broader social context that had shaped their lives as Blacks and as Jews.

The Black Jewish dialogue program has a great deal to teach people of all ages and backgrounds. With the arrival of new groups of immigrants and rising concern among some segments of the population, the United States is being challenged to develop a new level of awareness of what it means to be a multiethnic society, a home for people of different histories and belief systems, races and cultures. The program offers a prototype not

only for intervening in intergroup conflicts but for building coalitions between groups that are far better off working together than going it alone.

This manual is designed for three groups of readers: those interested in sponsoring a Black Jewish dialogue program on their campuses; those interested in using the campus program as a model for other kinds of intergroup relations work; and those who want to learn more about Black Jewish relations, as well as some underlying principles of intergroup relations in general, whether or not they are in a position to initiate a program. It is divided into five sections. An outline of the basic workshop model is followed by a case study of the program's implementation in one university. The next section takes a closer look at some of the issues dealt with at the workshops. A short section on the impact of the workshops is followed by guidelines for workshop sponsors.

The Workshop Model



THE BLACK JEWISH DIALOGUE WORKSHOPS are designed to empower students. Based on a model that combines information sharing, problem solving, and emotional healing, the four-hour workshops help participants to recognize and unlearn their own prejudices, reach out to other participants, and use the knowledge and skills they have gained to combat racism and anti-Semitism in the world around them. Recognizing that personal experiences and politics are equally important in intergroup relations, the model leaves room for the examination of relevant political issues at every stage of the dialogue process.

What follows is a basic workshop outline, structured to encourage free-flowing discussion in an atmosphere of gradually increasing trust.

Introductions

At the start of the workshop, each student shares his or her name, place of birth, ethnic, religious, and class identities, and something he or she is proud of about being Black or Jewish. This demonstrates at the very beginning that the students are there for themselves as well as each other and that expressing pride in one's own identity is an essential element of any intergroup dialogue.

First Thoughts

Blacks and Jews pair up with members of their own groups. Each member of a pair takes a turn repeating the word "Jew" (for the Blacks) or "Black" (for the Jews) while the other person shares, with as little censorship as possible, the first thought that comes to mind at each repetition of the term. This is a way of bringing to the surface attitudes and misinformation—ethnic slurs and stereotypes—the students have absorbed from their environment but know better than to say out loud or believe. Letting the students know that this is a place for frank discussion. When the group gets back together, some of the students share their responses for each term, and participants are encouraged to discuss what it's like to listen to the other group's first thoughts. These reactions often lead to some powerful exchanges.

Caucuses

To be an effective ally to members of another group, one needs to feel positively about one's own identity. For this reason, students divide into separate Black and Jewish caucuses, where each shares what has been good and what has been difficult about being Black or Jewish. Meeting together with others of similar backgrounds enhances the students' feelings of security. In addition, students seem better able to empathize with the other group's experience after they've had the chance to speak about their own lives.

Speak Outs

When the caucuses return, individual students share their stories with the entire workshop. The others listen carefully without interruption, discussion, or questions. The stories are often accompanied by tears, shaking, and expressions of anger. For many students, this is the most moving and transforming part of the workshop, giving them a firsthand look at the effects of prejudice. For the speakers, telling their stories to a roomful of respectful listeners can be a powerful experience, especially if they have never before had a chance to share their experiences with racism or anti-Semitism.

Scanning

Barriers between groups begin early in life, with incidents and images that build up over time and continually affect feelings and relationships. To help get at the roots of any prejudicial attitudes, students work together in pairs, taking turns sharing every memory that has to do with Blacks or Jews. As one student scans, the other listens attentively. When the stu-

dents think they have exhausted their memories they repeat the process beginning with their earliest recollections seeking new memories and more vivid details of those already shared As students scan they are encouraged to express their emotions an important part of the healing process

Four Steps to Empowerment

At this point in the workshop students are ready to examine their feelings of powerlessness in the face of racism and anti-Semitism and to discover how directly these are linked to their early experiences To encourage this process students are asked to respond to a series of instructions (a) Describe a time when you were mistreated growing up (b) Describe a time when you stood up and interrupted prejudicial statements or actions about Blacks or Jews (c) Describe a time when you did not and examine the similarities between the situation in which you were mistreated and the one in which you were unable to stand up to prejudice It is important that students share their success stories before they talk about their difficulties fighting prejudice so they don't start out feeling guilty or discouraged In addition sharing their successful attempts at combating anti-Semitism and racism inspires students to act powerfully in the future

Role Playing

This is one of the students favorite exercises Blacks and Jews briefly caucus and choose several stereotypes about their own group that they want their counterparts to learn to interrupt Then in mixed Black and Jewish teams the students role play situations that give them opportunities to interrupt the stereotypes The students are encouraged to interrupt the prejudicial remarks in a way that challenges the statement while respecting the person who makes it This practice session gives each student effective tools for fighting racism and anti-Semitism they may encounter at any time

Dealing with Political and Economic Realities

Once again Blacks and Jews caucus separately this time to choose one important issue they want the other group to better understand Each group reports its choice to the whole workshop taking time to explain its viewpoint on the issue carefully After each report the other group has ten minutes to ask questions and have them answered During that time students aren't allowed to refute the answers or provoke discussion rather they must repeat each answer they hear in their own words to make sure they understand it clearly This pushes the students to concentrate less on

their own biases and preconceptions about the issue and more on comprehending the other group's viewpoint and experience After each question answer period a free flowing discussion of the issue can proceed

Developing New Policies and Programs

Every workshop needs to include some time for students to translate what they've learned into concrete goals and programs to effect change on their campus Toward the end of their time together students brainstorm all the possible programs that might be implemented on their campus to continue the work begun in the dialogue and these are written on large sheets of newsprint taped to the wall The students then break into smaller groups to develop specific plans and each group reports back to the whole workshop Sometimes these ideas are actually implemented but even if they are not it's important for the students to see themselves as powerful and skilled enough to effect change on a broad scale

Closure and Evaluation

It's important to be able to measure the impact of any workshop or series of workshops on those who participated as well as to give students a chance to reflect on their experience No workshop should end without a time for each student to share a highlight of the event or something he or she had learned from the dialogue

In addition workshop sponsors and trainers are encouraged to conduct a more extensive evaluation by having students fill out questionnaires distributed at the beginning and several weeks after each workshop Questions should be designed to measure such factors as shifts in students attitudes toward the other group the relationships between each student's level of Black or Jewish identity and the impact of the dialogue and the relative effectiveness of each part of the workshop Students should also be asked to share concrete ways in which they implemented what they learned from their participation Have they been better able to interrupt ethnic slurs and jokes? Have their relationships with Blacks or Jews on campus changed? While such surveys need not pretend to be scientific they are necessary to document the achievement of the event and for planning future workshops and related programs

One School's Experience Black-Jewish Dialogue at Brown University



THE FAILURE OF A STUDENT DINNER led to what became an extremely successful series of Black Jewish dialogues at Brown University. When the quiet Ivy League campus in Providence, Rhode Island, was disturbed by racial and anti-Semitic vandalism in the fall of 1982, a few administrators decided it was time to increase communication between some of the major student groups. They invited students involved with the Brown Resource Center, the Third World Center, the Sarah Doyle Women's Center, and Hillel to a potluck dinner to discuss cooperative approaches to the tensions on campus. But when Black students refused to sit down with Hillel, giving as their reasons the Jewish group's support of Israel in the invasion of Lebanon and Israeli trade with South Africa, the plan fizzled. Instead, the incident touched off a concerted effort to deal with tensions between Blacks and Jews on campus.

Brown is a small, prestigious school in a medium-sized urban area. Its history of student activism includes a major student takeover in 1975 that resulted in expanded financial aid for minority students. Known as the most innovative of the Ivy Leagues, Brown has instituted an alternative curriculum that attracts students interested in flexibility and independent learning. The Resource Center, a major catalyst behind the Black Jewish workshops, is a clearinghouse for educational alternatives on and off

campus, encouraging independent study and community involvement on the part of students.

Former Resource Center coordinator Linda Kramer and then Hillel chaplain Rabbi Cathy Felix provided the impetus for the initial workshop held in the spring of 1983. After the incident with the dinner, we talked around and heard from faculty and students that there were tensions between Blacks and Jews in the classrooms. Kramer notes, "We felt it was important to open up communication and offer a place where students could confront tensions constructively." Contact was made with the National Coalition Building Institute, known internationally as the creator and facilitator of programs on coalition building and combating prejudice. Two NCBI human relations professionals, one Jewish and one Black, agreed to lead the first workshop in a series that would become part of the Black Jewish dialogue program of the American Jewish Committee and NCBI.

The next step was to attract students. The Resource Center sent a letter to all Black and Jewish sophomores at Brown, inviting them to build a bridge of understanding between two groups on campus. At first, the Jewish students responded more readily than the Blacks. Later discussions with participants revealed that the Black students had feared that a dialogue would distract attention from their primary concern with racism, something they felt happened historically in joint efforts with whites. Jews, on the other hand, felt a more immediate need to build alliances with other groups as a response to the sense of isolation and vulnerability that is a product of anti-Semitism. As it turned out, phone calls from Black staff members of the Resource Center were enough to reassure a number of Black students that their issue wouldn't be diluted, and they decided to attend. In all, 19 Black and Jewish students accepted the Resource Center's invitation, enough for a good-sized gathering.

When the first workshop began in April 1983, the Jewish and Black students sat on opposite sides of the room. (Several Black and Jewish administrators and faculty members also attended.) For the first half of the four-hour gathering, tensions ran high.

The workshop's turning point came when individuals were invited to speak out from the heart before the entire group about their life experiences. Two Jewish students spoke of anti-Semitic attacks on their families; a Black woman told of a racist incident from her childhood, powerfully expressing her long-pent-up indignation. The tension that had previously electrified the atmosphere gave way to feelings of compassion and respect. In the discussion that followed, the participants listened to each other with new openness. Their parting comments indicated that they left with a better understanding of racism and anti-Semitism and of the importance of being allies to one another.

The next fall, a core of Black and Jewish alumni of the first workshop decided to organize a second. This time, a letter of invitation was

drafted by the students themselves and as before staff members of the Resource Center made follow up calls. By the day of the workshop 17 Black and 19 Jewish students had signed up eight of whom had attended the first dialogue.

High energy and enthusiasm marked the tone of the second workshop. Tension again built in the early stages with heated discussion concerning stereotypes Blacks' skepticism about a common bond with Jews and the degree to which Jews can pass in white society.

It was the last part of the session designed to help participants interrupt expressions of racism and anti-Semitism they encounter in their daily lives that really brought students together. Two Jewish students participated in role playing one making racist remarks the other attempting to challenge them. Then two Black students did a similar exercise one attempting to convince the other that Jews have experienced oppression as well as Blacks. Yeah but man the Jews have never experienced slavery said the first student. The other shot back Haven't you ever heard of Moses? Amid a great deal of laughter and participation the role playing gave Blacks and Jews a chance to transcend their differences and go out on a limb for each other.

At this writing there have been six more Black Jewish workshops at Brown with attendance growing from 40 to 60 to 100 as word spread throughout the campus that interesting things were happening says Kramer.

Besides their role in building stronger relationships between the two groups both Kramer and current Resource Center coordinator Toni Fannin stress that the workshops increased students awareness of their own heritages. Within their own groups people began to notice commonalities and differences. Fannin says Black students discovered the diversity within the Black experience. Kramer notes that many participants now feel a new pride in their identity and observes that quite a few have emerged as leaders on campus since the workshops began.

The workshops have had other ripple effects at Brown as well. Fannin stresses that students felt it was essential to share what they'd learned with their families and friends. A group of six participants went even further forming a Black Jewish team to make presentations for synagogues churches and other community groups. And on campus says Kramer the idea of dialogue as a way of resolving tensions has become increasingly popular inspiring workshops for white women and women of color Black women and Black men and feminists and fraternity members. Perhaps most significantly the workshop series has been credited as a major force behind student actions protesting racial incidents on campus and demanding changes in Brown's policies toward minority students. Much of the leadership of these actions came from Black students who had attended the workshops and the Jewish students gave them consistent support. Their efforts led to the formation of a national committee

to study the situation of minorities at Brown which in turn led to some major institutional changes at the school.

At a potluck dinner following one of the workshops participants talked together about families friendships dating and their postworkshop experiences. All the participants reported talking at great length about the experience to roommates and friends staying up late into the night. A Black student and a Jewish student had attended a party together upon hearing an anti-Semitic comment the Black student thumbs up said to his friend Want me to handle this one? I know people who need this it's not like other workshops—it was mean said one student. Commented another It's never left me.

When Black and Jewish Students Talk Together



JEWISH PRIDE AND BLACK PRIDE—two themes that ran through every dialogue among the first things students spoke about and the touchstones that kept them going while exploring painful experiences later on. Sharing their reasons for their pride with the other group was a rare opportunity for most students and they took it on with enthusiasm. Our sense of social justice and the strong families we've built in spite of years of oppression makes me proud to be Black, said one young man. I'm amazed that we've been a group so long longer than maybe any other group that's around today and that makes me proud, said a Jewish student. Each group wanted very much for the other to realize the depth of its commitment. I'm not sure Blacks understand how important it is for me to be Jewish and how much I feel a connection to Jews all over the world, one Jewish student stated. The Blacks were similarly anxious for Jews to understand the importance of their Black identity.

Black Pride Jewish Pride

Jews have an incredible strength. I feel I can do almost anything. I've been taught that I have a base and I have people who love me. And every where I go if I find someone who is Jewish I feel good about that. —A Jewish student

I went to do some interviews for an anthropology class I'm taking. We interviewed these two older Black people. And while we were talking about different things about how they grew up and about their neighborhoods I just realized how much they'd gone through and the strength of character they must have had. And it makes me feel so proud. When I look at my parents I think the same thing—they went through so much so I could be here. —A Black student

Many of the students' reasons for being proud applied to both groups: the strength of families, the ability to endure and overcome hardship, a deep commitment to social justice. Realizing how many sources of pride they had in common brought the two groups closer together. They shared the knowledge that pride in the face of oppression is a promise that one will not only survive but triumph.

At the same time both Blacks and Jews talked about what happens when oppression undercuts their pride, making them doubt themselves and feel alienated from their own people.

For Blacks the issue was particularly alive as they grappled with the importance of being Black and in college. That often meant having to refute frequent assumptions that they made it to college on the strength of affirmative action rather than their own abilities. One student told how a former teacher had met his mother in the supermarket and expressed surprise that he had gotten into college. I know she assumes I only got in because of affirmative action, he said. Everyone automatically assumes that's the only reason Blacks can be at an Ivy League school. Another bluntly summed up the common frustration with a question: How do you expect me to achieve anything when my best is always your worst?

Being labeled an affirmative action beneficiary is especially painful for Black students who have already internalized racist messages of inferiority like the Black man who spoke candidly about his need to put up a defense mechanism when he was around white people. I always felt like oh my God I'm from a public high school, he said. I wasn't even in the top ten percent. I don't belong here. I'm always so afraid. Just let me pass my classes.

For Jewish students often pressured by the assumption that they would automatically excel such comments were a window to experiences very different from their own. They shared self-doubts of another kind: having less to do with their abilities than with the legitimacy of their experience of oppression. Confronted with the strength of Black pride and some harrowing stories of discrimination experienced by the Black students, some Jews felt as if they had no right to speak up for themselves.

My experience is small potatoes compared to yours, remarked one Jewish participant to the Blacks. How can I ever expect you to listen to my insignificant difficulties about being Jewish after what you've just shared with me? said another. One Jewish student diagnosed the problem accurately when she observed: Because Jews don't see themselves as

facing difficulty every day they do not recognize themselves as being oppressed. Therefore they have a hard time seeing themselves as equal to Blacks. There is a political dimension to her explanation as well. Discrimination against Jews is largely unacknowledged as an issue on the public agenda. It's no wonder that the students should have trouble looking at a concern that the world at large gives them so little reason to examine.

It took separate caucuses and some discussion on the part of the whole group for the Jewish students to see that they had indeed been strongly affected by anti-Semitism. Born twenty years after the Holocaust into a largely upwardly mobile Jewish community they intuitively sensed that life in the United States is not as secure for Jews as it may seem. One student expressed the dilemma eloquently. I find it so frustrating to try and explain to someone when they ask me, "Why do you feel so insecure?" I mean, nobody's ever done anything to you. I know that's not true, but I find it so hard to convince people that anti-Semitism is a legitimate concern or that my feelings are real. I'm not manufacturing them. It's not just paranoia. I get the feeling that other people wouldn't understand. The safety of the workshop allowed the Jewish students to explore the effects of anti-Semitism on their lives and gave the Black students new information about the Jewish experience.

Who Has Suffered More?

I think there's a great similarity between Blacks and Jews. We're both strong and loving peoples. We've both suffered. —A Jewish student

I think I now see one of the problems between Blacks and Jews. They somehow qualitatively try and measure the struggles they've gone through and it becomes a battle. Who's gone through more and who's achieved more. And yet I don't think that's very important. Because both had to go through a lot. And to try and measure it doesn't do any good. —A Black student

People often come to workshops trying to compare their oppressions. Which was worse, the Holocaust or slavery? Which hurt the most, my pain as a Black or yours as a Jew? If my family is well off and yours is poor, does that mean prejudice against us doesn't count? These are all variations on a single theme when the two groups get together. Who has suffered more?

When the Black Jewish dialogues began, many students were trying to answer that question. While some Jews had a hard time seeing that their experience of oppression counted, others seeing the Holocaust as the ultimate horror thought their people had suffered the most. Blacks, on the other hand, often found it hard to imagine that someone with white skin could have experienced oppression to the same degree that they had. Jews can pass, they said, as one student asserted. I can never take off my

skin, but you can take off that yarmulke any time. The Jews agreed that there was a difference. Nevertheless, replied one young man, I can take off this yarmulke, but they could still get me as a Jew.

I could pretend I wasn't Jewish, said another student in a long discussion about passing. But I don't want to pretend that I'm not Jewish. Just because we don't have to face it every day because of the color of our skin, the feelings that we do have aren't seen as legitimate because we could escape them, but I don't want to escape them, and I don't know that I really could.

Later in that same conversation, a Black student came to a new realization about the Jewish experience in the United States. I can see how, for a Jewish person, it might be frustrating to be told, "Yeah, yeah, you're white, you're one of us, you have the same privileges." But at the same time, there's also a line that you can't cross. And it's kind of like, for Black people, we know that we can't cross that line. But you can jump back and forth, or maybe not jump back and forth, but absolutely be pushed back and forth. You can taste the luxuries of being white, but at the same time, certain things are taken away from you. And I could see how there could be a kind of frustration, a pull from that. Because you can be okay some of the time, but we know we're never gonna be okay.

For many Blacks, the fact that Jews feel insecure about their status in the United States was a startling revelation. As their awareness grew, they came to realize that Jews are not just part of the white majority in the United States, but a distinct group with a history of discrimination and hardship, not entirely unlike their own. Some Blacks found this realization disconcerting at first.

Wait a minute—are you Jewish or are you white? one Black student asked a close friend at the workshop. There are many Jews who aren't white, but I'm white and I'm Jewish, replied her friend. But do I treat you as a white person or as a Jew? I think what you're asking me is, "Can I trust you?"

While Blacks were getting a new look at what life is like for Jews, the Jews were learning face to face about racism. For some, the workshops were a chance to acknowledge some of their own unaware prejudices. A particularly striking example occurred when, toward the end of a speak-out about her fears and insecurity as a Jew, a young woman spoke of her dislike for people who act in ways that reinforce ethnic and racial stereotypes. As an example, she spoke of a Black gas station attendant she had encountered who, she said, was acting lazy, slow, and dumb. I was angry at him, she said, because I didn't want my friend in the back seat to think the stereotype about Blacks being lazy is true. No one responded until an hour later, when a young Black woman spoke up indignantly.

Didn't any of you think to say anything? she asked the group. How could she have known in one minute that he was lazy and dumb, unless she already had that same stereotype about Blacks inside? Besides, why

should he have to conform or not conform to a set of criteria and who makes up those criteria anyway?

Afterward several Black students shared some of their own painful experiences with similar racist assumptions on the part of whites and the Jews saw another facet of racism. Always in such discussions it was essential for both groups to recognize that Jews had learned prejudicial attitudes not specifically because they were Jewish but because they were whites growing up in a racist society.

In general simply hearing the magnitude of racial oppression firsthand was enough to move the Jews to a whole new understanding of the Black experience. Most of their prior knowledge came from textbooks and the media hearing their fellow students often friends talk honestly about what it's like to be Black in the United States was a profoundly affecting experience. At no time was this more the case than during discussions about the Jesse Jackson campaign. As Blacks expressed the hope that Jackson's presidential bid had given their communities Jews put their fears of anti-Semitism aside in an attempt to understand the meaning of such a phenomenon for Black Americans. One Black student's declaration

Every Black vote for Jesse Jackson is a tear cut through all the arguments and gave the Jewish students a glimpse of the level of suffering many members of the Black community face every day.

Before the discussion of the campaign or any other political issue however came the stories from both Blacks and Jews of growing up under the shadow of racism or anti-Semitism. Full of courage and sensitivity these accounts brought the students closer together than any abstract discussion of racial politics ever could.

While their stories differed widely one couldn't help but be struck by the underlying similarities between the two groups' experiences. Both Blacks and Jews for example were acutely conscious of the scars of history. Jews spoke often of the emotional legacy of the Holocaust. One Jewish student told of his visit to Yad Vashem the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem where he saw pictures of dead bodies all lined up. It's made me terrified to be a Jew he said I don't know if there will ever be a place I know completely as home.

For Black students the experience of slavery had similar resonance. One young woman felt a tremendous rush of emotion when she simply tried to tell the group her name. I don't know why I'm crying when I say my name right now she said I guess it's because of the name Eaton I feel ties with it because I love my family but I also have the knowledge that it probably came from some slavemaster years ago. I hate to pronounce my last name I just feel like the descendant of a slavemaster.

Other students related incidents from their childhoods that revealed how similar the experiences of racism and anti-Semitism can be. A Jewish student's father's car was firebombed in the temple parking lot a Black student's family had rocks thrown through the windows of their

home in a primarily white neighborhood. A Black woman recalled a letter she had written in the fifth grade to her best friend's father who wouldn't let his daughter play with her because of her race. I never had the courage to mail it she revealed. The regret in her voice matched that of the Jewish student who had been unable to speak out against the anti-Semitism in her workplace. And the tales of ridicule and teasing rock throwing and beatings knew no boundary between those who were the only Blacks or one of a few Jews in their neighborhoods.

Both Blacks and Jews had long kept many of their emotions buried and for most the workshops were among the first opportunities they'd ever had to share with another group the trauma of anti-Semitism and racism. As they opened up they moved closer—literally as well as figuratively. At most schools the workshops began with Black and Jewish students sitting separately on opposite sides of the room. But as they spoke out they began to sit together sometimes with their arms around each other's shoulders offering quiet support to one another as they listened and learned.

Togetherness and Trust

Here on campus I see that Blacks and Jews or maybe even more so Blacks tend to be one group to themselves. I don't think that's bad because I also see that when you're a minority and discriminated against sometimes it makes you that way. But there should be an opportunity for Blacks and Jews who want to talk to each other to be able to. —A Jewish student.

I want to be proud of my heritage but at the same time I'm saying Why can't I be just a person? —A Black student.

As they grew closer the students found that they had common issues in the present as well as the past. As members of minorities on the threshold of adulthood they faced similar decisions about identity and assimilation. Some grappled with the influence of parents who felt less able to be openly proud of their heritage. One young Black woman for example felt betrayed by her father's objections when she stopped straightening her hair. The father I'd always look up to and respected who had been so active in the civil rights movement was now telling me something was ugly about my own natural hair she said. It really hurt and confused me. Another student who grew up with both a Christmas tree and a menorah every winter told how she couldn't discover the joys of being Jewish until she got to college. I wanted to learn more so I went to Yom Kippur services for the first time. I was so happy and so proud and I called home to say I went to services on Yom Kippur and fasted. My mother said You're skinny enough you shouldn't be denying yourself food for a day.

Other students like the woman who responded to questions about

Jewish attitudes toward intermarriage felt pressure from their parents to associate with members of their own group. My mother's a Holocaust survivor she said. It's hard for her to think she went through all of that to then have her daughter intermarry. Jewish cliquishness is usually for the purpose of survival. And a Black student voiced frustration at his parents' desire for him to make more Black friends. My parents keep telling me. You have to reach out into the Black community. I get so tired. I not only have to prove something to the white community but to the Black community as well.

Indeed, the question of how big a role ethnic identity should play in their lives weighed heavily in the minds of many students. Blacks frequently pointed out that Jews could choose, because of their skin color, to blend into white society. For many Jewish students, the dilemma felt like an either/or proposition. One young woman articulated the frustration well. I feel like I'll lose whichever way I turn she said. If I'm too involved with Jews, I won't be universal enough. If I'm with everyone, I won't be able to fully express myself as a Jew.

The Black students revealed similar ambivalence. Many resented the threat of being considered an Oreo— Black on the outside, white on the inside—by other members of the Black community and felt pressured by the notion that there's a particular way to be Black. One student told how he had been subject to such pressure at freshman orientation. This guy looked right at me and said, Some of you will turn out to be Oreos. But you won't be like that, will you? Your older brother was an Oreo, you know. I didn't know what to say, he said. I wanted to get up and tell him, What do you mean by being an Oreo? Is there one definition of being Black? There's a million different types of Blacks.

Obviously, nobody in their right mind can reject that they're Black. It's quite apparent, said another student. But a lot of Blacks think, If you're Black, then you should be this certain way. Well, is that any different than someone white saying, Well, you're Black, hey, you should be out there dancing!?

Both Black and Jewish students felt somewhat isolated with these concerns, and were relieved to find that they weren't alone in their struggles. Ironically, however, there were times when each group criticized the other's tendency to stick together. Each group felt threatened by the other's cliquishness; the students disliked being shut out or thought untrustworthy by their counterparts in the other group. At one point, a Black woman became very upset when one participant admitted, after telling of a childhood incident in which she's had rocks thrown at her for being a Jew, that she tended to spend time only with Jewish friends. It's not that I dislike anyone else, she responded to the Black woman's criticism, but I find comfort in hanging out with others who understand me. There's security in that.

During the same workshop, a Jewish woman became angry at a Black

man who told about a time when he'd been jailed for several months after a white woman had unjustly accused him of rape. While speaking, he had focused his attention primarily on two other Black men in the room. The Jewish woman resented this and said so. His response was that he couldn't have told the story at all if he hadn't been able to look at the two other Black men for solidarity.

The Jewish woman also criticized the man for telling the story with a smile on his face. I smiled because it was such an overwhelming experience, he answered later. It's the only way I could face it and still survive. This was one of several times that Jews questioned the reluctance on the part of many Blacks, particularly the men, to show their vulnerability. I never let anyone see how I feel, said one Black man. If I show you my pain, I'll be weak and vulnerable. As a Black person, I can't afford to do that. At the same time, many Jews acknowledged that, for them, showing rage and indignation was extremely difficult. If we get too angry, we won't be accepted, offered one student. I was taught by my family that Jews aren't supposed to get too loud or we'll stand out too much, said another.

These differences provided an opportunity for Jews and Blacks to help each other grow. The Jews showed the Black students that it might be safe to share their vulnerability. We can stand together and help each other express our grief. The Blacks encouraged the Jews to stand up for themselves. If I were a Jew, I'd go right into Jackson campaign headquarters and demand that they take my issues seriously and not leave until they did! The students came to see these differences not as reasons for alienation but as strengths that they could share.

Money and Power

It's a neat trick that we can get played against each other. Because Jews can get so high in the system and then we're controlled, so we always have to worry. Are we going to get shut out? —A Jewish student.

So you Jews can make more money than we can. And we end up fighting you instead of all the WASPs who own the Fortune 500 companies. —A Black student.

More than any other political issue discussed at the workshops, the topic of money and power proved crucial when it came to opening up Black Jewish dialogue. Questions about Jews and money were raised consistently by both Blacks and Jews and proved confusing for everyone. Are most Jews wealthy? Do they really have access to power in this society? What does Jewish upward mobility mean for Black Jewish relations?

On a personal level, these issues came up when Blacks and Jews discussed their stereotypes of one another, attempting honestly to bring to light some of the prejudices they had absorbed from a racist and anti-Semitic society. Many Blacks admitted that their stereotypes of Jews had

to do with money—some of their first negative thoughts when they heard the word Jew were rich businessman and ambitious. This made the Jewish students uncomfortable. When I hear those things about Jews I get scared, said one student. Those are the very stereotypes that we've gotten killed for. Another student raised a question that was on many people's minds: What about the fact that the majority of Jews at her Ivy League college appeared wealthy? A young woman responded: But aren't the majority of *people* here wealthy? Why point the finger at the Jews? Yet another Jewish student reflected: When people hear of Jews being wealthy they associate it with stepping all over people and being greedy and not caring about anyone. So when you're labeled Jew and wealthy they think you got there by hurting others. The issue students realized was not the amount of money a Jew might have but the negative stereotypes that are attached to their economic achievement.

The issue was discussed in greater depth during the second part of the workshops when the students had a chance to explore their questions in a political framework. Many Black students and some Jews as well arrived at the workshops thinking that Jews have not only a great deal more wealth but exert substantially greater political influence than do Blacks. A few of the Jewish students didn't initially understand the factors that have made it more difficult for Blacks to achieve economic and political success in the United States. Some observed that there were good reasons for Jewish upward mobility—one student for example described how hard his grandfather had worked in the garment district adding: In the Jewish community one of the biggest things is that the next generation should do better. The Jewish students failed to understand that they had options that Blacks did not. The effects of slavery were different from those of the immigration experience.

Only after further probing of the issue did a more complex set of considerations emerge. I guess I want to know where so high up all those Jews are, remarked a Jewish student. When I look at the people who have power who are in the upper echelon it's not the Jews. The people with a lot of wealth are Anglo Saxon Protestants.

We're talking in relative terms here, replied a Black student. Most Blacks are aspiring to be middle class. And so to most Blacks Jews appear to be in power. They're the next level up. Blacks don't see the Fortune 500 people on the street. What they see is the Jews.

What many Blacks did see on the streets growing up were Jewish owned stores in Black neighborhoods. Looking at this phenomenon helped students to see in microcosm how misinformation about Jewish wealth could divide Blacks and Jews. I think I'm beginning to understand what you're all saying about the myth of Jewish power, said a Black student. When a Black walks into a store you see this guy standing there he's not from your neighborhood. What can you think? So Black folk end up thinking Jews have so much power. It's all a kind of divide and

conquer thing.

A Jewish student continued: So you guys end up stereotyping Jews and say: Okay we hate the Jews and then you band together with white Christians. And then they turn around and say: Okay we hate the Blacks. And then all of a sudden you're nowhere. And that's how we get split apart.

These discussions could not have taken place without the trust that had been growing between the students during the course of the program. Issues of power and economics are among the thorniest for Blacks and Jews many groups have discussed them and found that it is difficult to make real headway toward understanding and alliance building. But because the students were growing closer to one another they could acknowledge their misperceptions and take in new information with a minimum of defensiveness. A discussion that started out as frustrating became extremely fruitful as Blacks and Jews learned that their growing solidarity meant not just better personal relations but greater possibilities for political and social change.

The Middle East

Why can't non Jews ever understand how scary it is for us to hear all these attacks on Israel? —A Jewish student.

I'm not sure—who exactly was there first anyway Palestinians or Jews? I don't understand the issues. —A Black student.

When Blacks and Jews were asked to choose the issue they most wanted the other group to understand the Jews invariably picked their ties to Israel and their objections to slurs like Zionism equals racism. Many had been disturbed by the tone of the debates over the Middle East on their campuses and were frustrated that their non Jewish friends didn't understand why anti Israel arguments and slogans threatened them so. I went to a lecture on campus about the Middle East where the speaker was equating Zionism with racism, recalled one student. I got so upset I just walked out of the room. I tried to talk to my roommate about it but she didn't even care to listen. She didn't see what the big deal was.

Students who attempted to explain what Israel meant to them as Jews often met initial resistance from some of the Blacks who entered the discussions with anti Israel attitudes. However contrary to what Jewish communal leaders concerned about Black attitudes toward Israel might fear some of the Black students proved to be more open minded than their initial posturing indicated. It's true and understandable that many Blacks on campus feel a strong alliance with the Palestinians as they do with other peoples of the Third World. But that doesn't in every case correspond to a blanket condemnation of Israel. Blacks generally agreed with the student who said: I think no Black would question Jews' rights

