

## Jews for "Race Revolution"

Posted At : February 17, 2012 8:30 AM | Posted By : Seth Chalmer

Related Categories: J-Vault, Black-Jewish relations, social justice, affirmative action, ethics, community relations, Black History Month, history, racism, race, justice, civil rights, social services



*The Negro's insistence that everyday practice in America match its democratic promise is bringing about significant changes in our society. The Race Revolution has already affected and will continue to affect Jews, Jewish life and Jewish communal services.*

Continuing our **Black History Month blog series**, for this week's J-Vault we'll sit in on an educational symposium which took place in 1964. **This week, from the J-Vault: *Changing Race Relations and Jewish Communal Service* (1965)**

*In February, 1964, over 300 Jewish communal workers in the New York metropolitan area attended a one-day conference at the Educational Alliance in New York City... The keynote speaker, Dr. Arthur Hertzberg, and the workshops, which were organized on an inter-disciplinary basis, were asked to consider the following three key questions:*

- 1. How can and should Jewish agencies participate in the race revolution?*
- 2. How can and should Jewish agencies help their members or clients to deal with their attitudes and behavior toward Negroes?*
- 3. How will this affect the agencies' primary Jewish purposes and services?*

The major address was delivered by Arthur Hertzberg:

It requires no great moral courage to assert, and even to mean, that every American who lays claim to personal decency must be involved in the struggle for the equality of the Negro... Speaking only for myself, I have acted on the assumption that the task of a Rabbi is not only to preach abstractly against segregation but involve himself concretely in the realities of the battle and to lead those whom he can influence towards comparable action...

...The moral position is clear: segregation is immoral and abhorrent to Judaism... The mandate of this generation, in the light of the acuteness of the problem of race in American society, is for Jews to be in the forefront in the solution of the problem.

This position has many virtues... Nonetheless, it is only a partial truth. To call it into question runs the risk that he who would do so will forthwith be accused of dragging his feet on segregation... Nonetheless, this danger must

be risked, and precisely for the sake of a true and realistic Negro-Jewish understanding.

Hertzberg's address goes on, including sections with the following headings:

Defining Jewish Identity in More Than Negative Terms

A Clear and Positive Value—Philanthropy—Is Losing Its Force for Particularism

The Necessity for Jewish Institutions to Reinforce Particularism

Parallelism and Differences in Negro and Jewish Minorities

He concludes with the following:

The Negro is today fighting for his rights, and Jews, along with all other men of good will, must certainly stand beside him. But Jews are today also continuing to work at preserving and trying to define the meaning of their particular survival and identity, in the light of their own tradition and historic experience. Since this is a parochial concern of their own, they must here stand alone.

Our age does not like aloneness; it seems to prefer togetherness on every level. But any serious Jewishness must live in tension between that which unites it with others even in the most moral of struggles and that which sets it uniquely apart.

Solomon Geld spoke on "Implications for Jewish Homes for the Aged".

Irving Greenberg spoke on "Implications for Jewish Casework Agencies," arguing, in effect, for affirmative action in social services: that such agencies "should set aside a portion of our existing services for Negro clients."

Morris Grumer spoke on "Implications for Jewish Vocational Services."

Albert D. Chernin, speaking on "Implications for Jewish Community Relations," took issue with Hertzberg:

What troubles me is that Rabbi Hertzberg in posing the issue as a clash between Jewish survival and the civil rights revolution does an injustice to both issues and to his own convictions. I am concerned that his arguments may be seized upon by some as justification for turning aside from the problem searing American society...

...The universal character of the struggle need not pose a threat to Jewish particularism. The particularism of Judaism is the process for perpetuating the universal truths to which it is committed.

Walter Ackerman discussed "Implications for the Jewish School."

Walter A. Lurie addressed "Implications for Jewish Community Organization."

Harold Arian spoke on "Implications for the Jewish Community Center:"

In short, the full weight of the Jewish community center as a social institution, as a business operation, as an educational force and as a participant in planning for community improvement should bear upon its fulfilling an important role in the race revolution.

Every J-Vault post ends with a link to the document so you can "Read More" but in this case, there really is so very much more to read. The above shows only the sparest of skeletons of an amazing 42 page document. If you want to reflect about race in America and our (the Jewish community's) relationship to it, do yourself a favor and avail yourself of these links below.

*[Read more...](#)*

*[Download directly...](#)*



*To read more publications at intersections of Black and Jewish history, see this special [Bookshelf for Black History Month](#).*

*(Remember, if you're a **registered** user [it's free], you can **create bookshelves** like this one to save sets of BJPA documents for later. Keep them private, or publish them to the web to share with colleagues. Sort manually, or automatically by date or title. View or print the lists, or export to MS Word for easy bibliographies.)*