

Crown Heights Riot Anniversary

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Related Categories: community relations, Black-Jewish relations, discourse, history, diversity, dialogue, antisemitism

Friday, August 19, is the twentieth anniversary of the Crown Heights Riots. A number of interesting articles have already appeared marking the milestone, and I imagine more are forthcoming. See especially [this by Jane Eisner](#) and [this by Josh Nathan-Kazis](#), but if you read only one article on this anniversary, read [Ari L. Goldman's "Telling It Like It Wasn't"](#):

My job was to file memos to the main “rewrite” reporters back in the Times office in Manhattan about what I saw and heard... Yet, when I picked up the paper, the article I read was not the story I had reported. I saw headlines that described the riots in terms solely of race. “Two Deaths Ignite Racial Clash in Tense Brooklyn Neighborhood,” the Times headline said. And, worse, I read an opening paragraph, what journalists call a “lead,” that was simply untrue: “Hasidim and blacks clashed in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn through the day and into the night yesterday.”

In all my reporting during the riots I never saw — or heard of — any violence by Jews against blacks. But the Times was dedicated to this version of events: blacks and Jews clashing amid racial tensions...

... On Aug. 21, as I stood in a group of chasidic men in front of the Lubavitch headquarters, a group of demonstrators were coming down Eastern Parkway. “Heil Hitler,” they chanted. “Death to the Jews.”..

...Suddenly rocks and bottles started to fly toward us and a chasidic man just a few feet away from me was hit in the throat and fell to the ground. Some ran to help the injured man but most of us ran for cover. I ran for a payphone and, my hands shaking with rage, dialed my editor. I spoke in a way that I never had before or since when talking to a boss.

“You don’t know what’s happening here!” I yelled. “I am on the streets getting attacked. Someone next to me just got hit. I am writing memos and what comes out in the paper? ‘Hasidim and blacks clashed’? That’s not what is happening here. Jews are being attacked! You’ve got this story all wrong. All wrong.”

I didn’t blame the “rewrite” reporter. I blamed the editors. It was clear that they had settled on a “frame” for the story. The way they saw it, there were two narratives here: the white narrative and the black narrative. And both had equal weight.

On the anniversary of this low point in the African-American and Jewish relationship, here are some selected publications from our [Black-Jewish Relations](#) topic:

- [Negroes and Jews](#) (1966)
- [Why Can't They Be Like Us?](#) (1969)
- [The Interracial Crisis: How Should Jews Respond?](#) (1969)

- **Selective Black Hostility Toward Jewish and Non-Jewish Whites** (1978)
- **Keeping a Black-Jewish Sense of Balance** (1979)
- **Blacks and Jews: The Strained Alliance** (1981)
- **Behind the Black-Jewish Split** (1986)
- **Face to Face: Black-Jewish Dialogues on Campus** (1987)
- **Sh'ma December 1995: Jews and Blacks**
- **Black and Jewish Members of Congress: A House Undivided** (1995)
- **Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism** (2000)
- **Blacks and Jews in America: History, Myths, and Realities** (2006)
- **African American-Jewish Relations: an AJC History** (2007)