
DECEMBER 2022 ANTI-SEMITISM

A New Legal Approach to Jew-Hatred

Using anti-Semitic indigeneity arguments against anti-Semites

by Tal Fortgang and Hannah E. Meyers

IN SEPTEMBER, THE ORGANIZATION STOPANTISEMITISM RELEASED A REPORT announcing what any yarmulke-wearing Ivy Leaguer already knew: Elite universities are rife with white-hot anti-Semitism. Intellectual bastions from Yale to Columbia received failing grades in making Jews feel physically safe, reporting anti-Semitic incidents, and refusing to adopt BDS resolutions.

Campus anti-Semitism usually manifests as a vicious strain of anti-Zionism, as in the recent scandal at Berkeley Law School, where several student affinity groups amended their bylaws in coordinated fashion to prohibit “speakers that have expressed and continued to hold views...in support of Zionism.” With such statements justified in the name of unimpeachable goals, such as “providing a supportive community space for all indigenous people globally,” as the Berkeley Law groups put it, Jewish students are put on the defensive and forced to self-censor or abandon their core beliefs.

Most college-age Jews remain Zionists, however, and consider their Zionism central to their Jewish identity. This means that Jews looking to take on leadership positions and generally excel at important institutions are increasingly at a disadvantage, as their support for Israel is considered disqualifying. At universities including UCLA, USC, Tufts, and Duke, Jewish students have already faced the stark choice between remaining proudly Zionist and participating in campus life.

This is all the more disturbing because the themes and accusations characteristic of elite anti-Semitism mirror the rantings now frequently hurled at Jews on New York City subways and Brooklyn streets—except with longer words and academic-sounding concepts. The message is the same from self-righteous professors, amped-up student activists, and aggressive vagrants alike: Jews constitute a European entity that usurps indigenous peoples.

This theory can take a few different shapes, but its premise is consistent: Jews, having emerged from Europe as a stateless nation, are white oppressors and occupiers wherever they have since traveled. One frequently hears that the Jews have stolen Israel from the indigenous Palestinians. The domestic version of this canard echoes the classic Marxist trope that Jews exploit honest laborers for profit. Jews, for example, are “greedy landlords,” according to the campaign materials of a onetime New York City Council candidate. Or, by the lights of trendy intersectional analysis, they are willing beneficiaries of white supremacy who reap the profits of minority exploitation. In its extreme Farrakhanite form, the argument maintains that Jews have stolen Judaism itself from “real” non-white Jews.

But anyone now pushing back against either the lowbrow or highbrow versions of this anti-Semitism can use its legal and logical arguments of “indigeneity” against itself.

Because indigeneity is such a flawed concept, it requires a host of double standards and deceptions to keep it going. And at this moment, exposing these theories, their implications, and the anti-discrimination laws they likely violate may be the best way to combat the anti-Semitic assault.

The progressive left increasingly values “indigeneity” above all. Progressives in the fields of education, entertainment, and even medicine routinely express the wish that every nation should be returned to its proper place, as if history had never unfolded. Institutions influenced or dominated by progressives now frequently begin their proceedings with “land acknowledgments”—statements about how the words being written or the institutions issuing them sit on lands that were once the stomping grounds of Native Americans. In so doing, they are making a confession of their complicity with the West’s settler-colonialist origins. Colonialism is seen as Europe’s great sin, inextricably tied up with racism, slavery, and, to many, capitalism.

Indigeneity, by contrast, connotes innocence, victimhood, and a cooperative society that would have flourished were it not tainted by European ideas about wealth—all of which amounts to moral currency in the social-justice economy.

Anti-Israel zealots, who were once content to argue that Israel is a legitimate state that exceeded the boundaries of its sovereignty, have fallen in line. Their main thrust is no longer that the putative occupation of the West Bank is unjust. Rather, they now believe and argue that Israel is illegitimate because it is a white European colonialist project that displaced native people of color. And the nub of the argument, logically necessary to every claim that Israel is colonialist or that Jews are white Europeans, is that Jews are not “native” or “indigenous” to the Levant.

Follow the logic. If Ashkenazi Jews who emigrated from Europe to Israel (or the Anglosphere) are colonizers rather than historically indigenous to the region, then they are *not real Jews*. They are impostors. The favored theory, promoted in part by the novelist Arthur Koestler in his late demented-crackpot phase, is that they are Khazars whose descendants converted at the turn of the second millennium. And they are working out the details of their diabolical thousand-year plan to steal a national narrative so that they can displace brown-skinned natives.

This is historically false in ways even Israel’s critics should understand. Not only are Ashkenazi Jews *not* Khazars, Israelis aren’t even majority Ashkenazi. Millions of non-European Jews who certainly do not look “white” returned to Israel from Arab lands in the 20th century, and they and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren now make up approximately half of the population. In any case, Ashkenazi Jews can trace their heritage far beyond Poland and the Pale of Settlement, which might explain why Jewish sages in those territories wrote in a Semitic language about laws they would fulfill when they returned to Zion.

Even anti-Zionist Jews today would admit that tracing their heritage back to ancient Judea—and before it, to the Davidic dynasty, Sinai, and the Exodus from Egypt—is unquestionably central to their tradition. This is so whether Jews are considered a nation, a religion, an ethnicity, or some combination thereof. It is what unites Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Italian, Ethiopian, and Indian Jews under one banner, making them all Jews rather than disparate groups with similar rituals.

Calling Ashkenazi Jews white colonizers, cutting off their lineage a millennium too soon, therefore strikes at the heart of the Jewish tradition by denying their ability to define themselves. Proponents of this charge are saying that our Jewishness is a false (and malicious) national entity bearing a false claim of shared national-territorial origin under the guise of a false religion. Like the vulgar conspiracy theorist shouting on the street—or the Black Hebrew Israelites who tried to massacre Jewish children in Jersey City in 2019—progressive anti-Semites insist that most Jews are not *real Jews*, who would be entitled to live in their ancestral homeland. They stole the distinction, and they stole Arab land.

This narrative is also false because it’s built on the idea that a people *can* be indigenous to a place, when in fact all human beings are ultimately indigenous to the same square of Africa. The relevant question is about the sovereignty a nation exercises over a territory or, in the moral calculus, the centrality of a place to a nation’s constitution. On the realist question of sovereignty, Israel obviously prevails. And on the moral matter, the anti-colonialist effort to deny Israel’s centrality to Jewish national identity is pure anti-Semitic lunacy. Campus activists have ultimately adopted the nutty conspiratorial Jew-hatred of the likes of Louis Farrakhan.

Using the language of indigeneity to attack Israel is a left-wing innovation on an old theme. For as long as Israel has existed, its supporters have known intuitively that most “criticism” of the state was anti-Semitic in nature. That discrediting fact was easy to prove when Israel was constantly at war with neighboring countries that affirmed, over and over again, that they would never accept the existence of a Jewish state on “Arab land.” So, as some these countries abandoned their rejectionism in favor of peace treaties and economic cooperation, Israel’s opponents were forced to pivot.

Arabs newly calling themselves Palestinians—the cultural appropriation, by the way, of a word used to connote the Jews of the area before the State of Israel was incepted—ventured a fresh line of attack, literally and figuratively, and Israel’s Western critics followed. The Palestinian justification for bombings in Jerusalem and Netanya was that Israel was occupying territory it had never rightfully acquired. This theory operated on the conceit that if Israel were to give up certain swaths of land under its control, terrorism would cease and a peaceful two-state solution would reign. But there was no connection between territorial concessions and lasting peace because complete rejectionism, with support from left-wing movements in the West, would never die. It would only morph and adapt.

Now, students from Berkeley to NYU wield familiar left-wing jargon to whitewash that same rejectionism and explain why they find violence against Israeli civilians worthy of celebration. If *Zionists*—substituting the Z-word for the J-word should do the trick—are white European colonialists occupying Arab land, then “movements for Palestinian liberation,” as the Berkeley students put it, are reflections of “anti-racism and anti-settler colonialism.” (For good measure, the law students added that banning Zionists demonstrated student organizations’ “desire for equality and inclusion.”)

This activist jargon necessarily assumes that Jews are white interlopers, bourgeois capitalists, “eternal wanderers” who colonize and subjugate, in mindset if not literally, wherever they go—Israel, America, or anywhere else. And as far as the Levant is concerned, this covers lands from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea and from the Golan Heights down to Eilat.

This premise has become a staple of progressive movements obsessed with identifying oppressor groups and seeking to punish them in the name of equity. American Jews have flourished economically, and the “start-up nation” of Israel has made the desert bloom. These successes actually makes both groups suspect, if not presumptively guilty,

of the crime of settler-colonial capitalism. It is no coincidence that the Black Lives Matter movement tries to draw through lines “from Ferguson to Palestine,” or that Representative Rashida Tlaib claims that it is “the same people that make money and—yes, they do—off of racism, off of these broken policies... From Gaza to Detroit.” This is a timeless form of Jew-hatred: As long as the Jews do not go back “where they came from,” they remain parasites on the natives, exploiting their labor, stealing their resources, and destroying the noble indigenous culture.

But denying the historic Jewish connection to the Land of Israel in this way—denying Jews the right to self-definition and forcibly categorizing them as white Europeans—is discriminatory and likely a violation of civil-rights law. Doing so publicly and repeatedly denigrates a core tenet of a tradition that unifies a group organized around shared heritage. On campuses, especially, it leads to discrimination and harassment. And in the United States, we have laws against that sort of thing.

Here is where the concept of indigeneity can be effectively turned on its head by pro-Israel lawyers. It violates American anti-discrimination law by turning Jews into a racial group before subjecting them to systematic disfavor. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin, which, the Department of Education has noted, “can include discrimination based on...shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics,” may include telling Ashkenazi Jews that they are “too white” to be the real Jews of the Bible, or to be part of one nation with their Mizrahi or Sephardic brethren.

Some lawyers have expressed skepticism that our current anti-discrimination-law framework can protect Jewish students from the anti-Zionism that they know, but have trouble proving, is anti-Semitic. One challenge has to do with the Department of Education’s interpretations of Title VI. Title VI is the section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that bans institutions receiving federal funding—which includes nearly every university in America today—from allowing discrimination against any person based on their race, color, or national origin. It is the piece of legislation that authorizes the Department of Education to investigate, monitor, and sue universities for civil-rights infractions. According to the Department of Education, however, it does not explicitly protect individuals on the basis of religion. In this reading, Title VI would cover Jews only if they are being discriminated against on the basis of “race, color, or national origin.” This has been a problem in the past because Jews come in many colors, and

from many countries. But religion itself is unnecessary to arguments for the centrality of tracing their lineage to the Holy Land. Even thoroughly secular Jews understand that a common national heritage in the Levant is what unites world Jewry.

It's what makes Jews one people even if they speak different languages, have different color skin, and observe Judaism with different practices. And so, the concepts and terminology that the anti-Israel left chooses to employ now actually pit anti-Israel zealotry against American anti-discrimination laws.

We counsel an updated application of Natan Sharansky's famous Three D's test. "Criticizing" Israeli Jews for being white colonizers does not merely aim to delegitimize Israel; it **delegitimizes** Jews by severing them from their constitutive national symbols, holy books, and beliefs. It **demonizes** Jews by casting them as "white occupiers" who exploit non-white people. And it engages in rank **double standards** against Jews by singling out for scrutiny, among all the nations of the world, their interrelated claims to their ancestral homeland and national unity.

Just imagine the uproar if whites on university campuses told Afro-Caribbean students that they were not *really* black and could not share the banner with black students from other parts of the world. The victims of such harassment would quickly and rightly have administrators in their corner. The school could lose its federal funding for allowing an out-group to tell an in-group who they are and who they are not, and which national bonds emerging from the mists of time are sufficient to confer unity. Yet that is what happens every time activists deploy the indigeneity canard to demonize Zionism as a colonialist project.

And this is how progressives tantalized by the success of the postcolonialist anti-racist movement in the United States have badly overplayed their hand. They have run headlong into the Civil Rights Act. Lawyers up to the task of defending Israel and American Jews can and should sue institutions that fail to protect Jews. The lawyers must identify and explain the horrific and patently anti-Semitic implications of calling Ashkenazi Jews "white"—not because there is anything wrong with being white, but because it is maliciously inaccurate—and calling Israel a colonialist state.

When campus activists call Israel "colonialist" or Israelis "white Europeans," they trace Jewish history back only to Europe. But history is more than a millennium old, and Jews can trace their heritage back much further, all the way to Jerusalem and

Beersheba and Yavneh, well before the Romans first renamed Judea “Palestine” to sever the Jewish connection to the land. Referring to Arabs as “indigenous” or “native” similarly rewrites history *and the Jewish tradition* by erasing the Jewish national and religious connection to the Land of Israel—possibly the most foundational element of Jewishness no matter how abstractly defined.

As elite institutions adopt the trendiest, crassest anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, the Jewish legal defense creates itself. Indigeneity may be a silly value to champion, but if that is the framework that progressives insist on, it will collapse under the weight of its own bankruptcy and hypocrisy. Postcolonial anti-Semitism will fall apart as soon as Israel’s defenders expose its delegitimization, double standards, and demonization for what they are: the oldest form of hatred, going by its latest name.

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O Ye of Little Faith: The Anti-Semitism of Kanye West

The billionaire star is not just crazy. His Jew-hating politics have a history—and a radical potential.

by [Elliot Kaufman](#)

KANYE WEST IS NOT FROM THE HOOD. THE SON OF AN ENGLISH PROFESSOR AT CHICAGO State University, he struggled to be taken seriously as a rapper until he realized that his middle-class background was an asset, not a liability. The gangster rap of the 1980s and

'90s, much of it play-acted by middle-class blacks anyway, had a comparatively limited appeal. West, who now goes by the name Ye, took hip-hop to new heights by offering “luxury rap, the Hermès of verses,” as he put it in a 2011 number, “sophisticated ignorance, write my curses in cursive.” It turned out to be a recipe for 21st-century superstardom. The occasional emotional outburst didn’t hurt either. Since his emergence in 2004, Kanye has won 21 Grammy Awards and become a billionaire, one of the wealthiest black people in America.

West also spent all October and early November waging a war of words against the Jews. The unusual thing about his meltdown isn’t that a major black public figure decided to go “death con 3 On JEWISH PEOPLE,” as he tweeted. Nor is it that a black anti-Semite was raised middle-class and is now rich, rather than poor. What’s unusual is that black leaders, intellectuals, and masses haven’t rallied to his defense with excuses and recriminations.

The naive view is that the refusal to defend West marks a sea shift in black attitudes toward Jews, transcending the impulse to defend the indefensible just because it was done by a fellow African American. The cynical view is that if West hadn’t first angered black people with his comment that slavery was “a choice,” and betrayed black leaders with his decision to put on the MAGA cap, the reaction would have been entirely different.

West’s accusations are as follows. Record labels managed by Jews have screwed him. “Jewish people have owned the black voice.” George Soros controls the world silently. “If Rahm is sitting next to Obama, or Jared is sitting next to Trump, there is a Jewish person right there controlling the country.” Abortion is a holocaust against black people, and blacks are “programmed” to get abortions by the Jewish media. Jews first came into money as divorce lawyers, and they broke up his family. They took his kids away. The “Jewish Zionists” told his Christian ex-wife Kim Kardashian to start behaving immorally. He compared himself to a 14-year-old girl who has been raped for years and then says, as a result, that she hates all men. He said he can’t be an anti-Semite because blacks are Jews. He admires Louis Farrakhan. A Jewish doctor lied by diagnosing him with bipolar disorder. He has been off medication for two years.

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In other words, Kanye West has lost his mind. But that doesn’t explain enough. If West had blamed the Iroquois for his woes, *that* would be unhinged. But he didn’t. He blamed the Jews, and that’s no accident of mental illness. West found a powerful political explanation for his experience, one that already has a pedigree in the black community—anti-Semitism.

Look at his accusations again:

Reference to Jewish exploitation is de rigueur in writings about blacks and Jews. Kanye blames record labels; historically, the Jewish villain was a local landlord or shopkeeper. “It is Jews who control the economy of Harlem and use it for themselves and for the benefit of Israel,” said Malcom X. One of the reasons, however, there have been many Jewish-owned buildings and stores in black areas, Nathan Glazer once pointed out, is that these were formerly Jewish areas. Blacks chose to move there in large part because they knew they would be safe in Jewish neighborhoods, whereas other white communities would use deadly violence to drive them out. Landlords and merchants have never been popular, but Jewish ones were the least of blacks’ problems, and they knew it.

That Jews own and distort the black voice, or colonize the black mind, was a complaint of Marcus Garvey, the black nationalist leader, when he stormed out of the NAACP offices in 1917. Harold Cruse’s 1967 book, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, declared a modern classic by the New York Review of Books, decries “the great brainwashing of Negro radical intellectuals” via “Jewish-Marxist nationalism.” In each case, Jews were scapegoated for the failure of other blacks to adopt whatever solution the anti-Semite was proposing.

Leaders of the African American Teachers Association warned during New York’s 1968 Ocean Hill–Brownsville schools crisis of a “mental genocide” of black kids by Jewish teachers. Even the mushy investigation officially carried out by the city conceded that anti-Semitism during the conflict was “open, undisguised, nearly physical in its intensity,” yet black leaders dodged. “If a black leader is to be responsive to the needs of his people, he cannot be a Jewish leader,” said Floyd McKissick, leader of the Congress of Racial Equality.

That Jewish advisers or financiers have Gentile political leaders wrapped around their fingers is a classic going back millennia. The mere presence of a Jew in a senior advisory political position is prima facie evidence of deviousness and manipulation. Any misdeeds would only be “signs,” as Harvard’s Henry Louis Gates Jr. once put it, in analyzing Nation of Islam propaganda, “of an essential [Jewish] nature that is evil.”

Emphasis on genocide and rape was a mainstay of Black Power rhetoric in the 1960s and ’70s, with wild accusations against teachers’-union leader Albert Shanker, “Zionists,” and sometimes both at the same time. The crimes Jews are said to commit are demonic; note West’s invocation of child rape. In October, the basketball player Kyrie Irving promoted a movie that accuses Jews of Satan-worship. In these cases, Jews are not so much dehumanized as rendered anti-human, an enemy of all.

That West can’t be an anti-Semite because he is a Semite is an adaptation of an old, disingenuous Arab claim. The preachment of many of the sects called the Black Hebrew Israelites is that racist Jews have been suppressing the truth of black Jewishness, or even that blacks are the real Jews, leaving the fake ones as devilish imposters.

Even West's desperate accusation against his psychiatrist is hardly novel. On February 4, 1961, the *Amsterdam News*, New York's major black paper, published an article, headlined "They Let Them Die," on how Jewish doctors went to Harlem Hospital to "pick out a number of Negro patients whom they carried off to Mt. Sinai for experimentation." In reality, Harlem Hospital was over capacity and so Mt. Sinai agreed to take on surplus cases. But writers, editors, and many readers were only too ready to receive news of Jewish Mengele-ism.

These people weren't simply crazy. They may not have been crazy at all. Neither were the black student groups at Harvard, Columbia, and many other colleges who invited Farrakhan representatives to speak in the 1980s and '90s. Now, as then, anti-Semitism has a function: It translates traditional and retrograde attitudes into a political interpretation with potential for radical social action.

So it was in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where local preachers laid the groundwork and served as apologists for the deadly 1991 riots. For three days, black rioters proclaiming themselves the second coming of Hitler beat up any Jew they could find. In this magazine in November 1979, Dorothy Rabinowitz foresaw the violence, noting that in Crown Heights, "public expression of anti-Semitic sentiment, as a means of conveying political antagonism, seems now to have become normal." When I spoke to one of the rabble-rousing black reverends in 2021, he still justified his actions with all kinds of grievances, comparing Chabad to the Ku Klux Klan and substantiating his claims with minutiae about political maneuvering and access to government funding. Decades from now, I expect to hear similar figures use the *New York Times*' latest distortion—that Hasidic schools steal funds from poor black children—as a justification for some future attack.

Even after a Jew had been murdered in Crown Heights, with dozens beaten and thousands forced into hiding, "civil-rights leaders" such as Al Sharpton continued to fan the flames and suggest that the Lubavitchers had deserved the pogrom they got. Only days before the riot, Sharpton had said, "If the Jews want to get it on, tell them to pin their yarmulkes back and come over to my house." He said it in defense of Leonard Jeffries, then the chairman of black studies at City College, who was under fire for blaming Jews for the slave trade, among other wild theories. The black New York radio station WLIB and the *Amsterdam News* and *City Sun* papers also rallied to Jeffries's defense. Not one black lawmaker in Albany signed the condemnation of Jeffries.

In reporting on the 30th anniversary of the Crown Heights riots last year for the *Wall Street Journal*, I spoke to Brooklyn's Laurie Cumbo, then majority leader of the New York City Council. Cumbo called the riots "the Crown Heights Uprising," because "riots' give the impression of [having] no basis."

So I hope you'll forgive my cynicism about the response to Kanye West. If West hadn't first raised the ire of black leaders with his friendly treatment of Donald Trump, we would hear now that he's speaking from a place of pain. We'd hear that anti-Semitism "is for some black folks a defense against antiblack racism on the part of Jews," as bell hooks, the pioneering black feminist scholar, wrote in 1992. Adapting James Baldwin, apologists would explain that when West said "Jew," he really meant "white." But, as Earl Raab pointed out in COMMENTARY in January 1969, "that is an exact and acute description of political anti-Semitism. 'The enemy' becomes the Jew, 'the man' becomes the Jew,... who stands symbolically for generic evil."

Anti-Semitism from above, in speeches and tracts, has always proceeded in a dialectic with anti-Semitism from below, with rocks and bricks. Kanye West is nuts, and so is the guy who sucker punches a Hasid in Brooklyn. They hear the same noise—and each other.

West has found himself with few elite allies today, but as the writer Hussein Aboubakr Mansour points out, his analysis of American life has become hegemonic in refined circles. Think about it. There's a structure that controls everything in America but is "mystified and hidden from critique." The structure, formed by actions over many years by disparate individuals in positions of power, manipulates society, rigging the game. Instead of "Jewish power," however, the structure is called "white supremacy." Critical race theorists speak of *white* universities, *white* corporations, and *white* media, with "white" signifying a corrupt essence and hidden hand.

Mansour calls this "a German way of thinking." West uses it, and his focus on Jews allows him to make black grievances coterminous with white grievances, rather than putting them at odds. "Who you think created cancel culture?" West tweeted, along with "I'm starting to think anti-Semitic means n—r." Anti-Semitism makes for a "wider tent" than critical race theory, Mansour writes, allowing both blacks and whites to claim victimhood.

Dropped by CAA, Gap, Adidas, and Balenciaga in a matter of days, Kanye West, too, can be portrayed as a victim of Jewish aggression. Jesse Jackson tried this during his 1984 presidential campaign; after pointedly refusing to repudiate Farrakhan for praising Hitler, and suffering politically for it, Jackson claimed that the Jews were persecuting him, and then he continued using Farrakhan's Nation of Islam bodyguards.

It's the old complaint: *This animal is very wicked, just see what happens if you kick it.* It is the essence of the distressingly common obfuscation that the "Jewish response" to Kanye West's anti-Semitism "proves Kanye's point." It's a clever remark, but flat wrong. Adidas running from bad press doesn't come close to proving a Jewish media conspiracy to destroy black people, let alone run the world. It proves only that crude and crazy-sounding conspiracies about Jews place their promoters out of bounds in American public life.

To say that Jews have proved Kanye West's point is merely to copy Kanye's bigoted pattern from a safer remove. It treats the actions of every Jew as a collective expression of all of Jewry, and it ascribes devilish motives where decent ones are far more plausible: Jews tend to take offense at conspiratorial slanders, knowing well where they can lead.

It is remarkable, as Milton Himmelfarb wrote in COMMENTARY in March 1969, that “in the black rhetoric the Negro seems to have only two external enemies in the United States, whites generally and Jews specifically.” There was, however, good reason for black cultural isolationists to fixate on Jews, rather than, say, Italians or Poles. A verbal stab at the Jews, blacks' best allies by any metric, is sure to accomplish two things. First, it elicits a hurt, furious reaction from a bevy of Jewish organizations, drawing media attention. Second, it places black integrationists in a bind: Either they condemn their fellow black and lose some credibility with the black street, or they defend a black anti-Semite and precipitate a break with their Jewish allies.

As Henry Louis Gates Jr. put it in 1992, “the new anti-Semitism arises not in spite of the black-Jewish alliance, but because of that alliance.” Transracial cooperation, and the political and cultural vistas it opens up, is taken as a threat to racial authenticity and radical resistance. For black isolationists, writes Gates, “the original sin of American Jews was their involvement—truly ‘inordinate,’ truly ‘disproportionate’—not in slavery,” as was typically alleged, “but in the front ranks of the civil rights struggle.” Jewish record producers have been disproportionately guilty not of stifling black music, but of championing and popularizing it, inevitably bringing about some of the same difficult compromises of integration.

Any confrontation with black anti-Semitism incurs risk for Jews, but it is necessary. First, black anti-Semitism places traditional Jews in physical danger every day on the streets of Brooklyn and not only there. Many Jews have moved to neighborhoods where they can usually avoid being mugged by such a reality, but some won't—or can't afford to. They are owed practical, moral, and political support, including against progressives whose policies release criminal Jew-haters to the streets, where they can attack again.

Second, black anti-Semitism has a unique ability to strike at the heart of liberalism, the older kind that has often made exile in America seem for Jews like a vacation from history. Jewish success and prominence in America—taken by some as a standing insult—have hinged on liberal principles of merit, equality before the law, pluralism, free expression, and individual rights, as opposed to group privileges. Black anti-Semitism, in denying the legitimacy of Jewish success and prominence, is also an assault on those ruling principles. Its deeper meaning is to call the American system a fraud, a manipulation, and a conspiracy.

Kanye West doesn't need to be told how hurtful his comments are, or how illiberal. He knows and smirks about it in his interviews. He doesn't need to be taken to Yad Vashem to learn. He doesn't want to learn—and he smirks about that, too. He needs to be refuted on the facts of American life, his explanations countered by more convincing explanations, his ideas opposed with better ideas. While Kanye West's ravings make an implicit bid for a transracial politics of anti-Semitism, a competing politics, one that is pro-pluralist and anti-racialist, is far more persuasive to the great mass of Americans. How better to help America than for Jews to make that case?

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