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A SPECIAL REPORT

THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING: A UNIVERSITY COURSE ON AFRICAN AMERICAN/JEWISH RELATIONS

Benny Kraut

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"Just as a black is different [i.e., separated from other peoples] by virtue of his skin color, so too Jews are different [i.e., separated] from all other nations by virtue of their deeds." — Sefer Aggadah

"The president [George Bush] now surely sees that once the poison is put into the political bloodstream, the sicknesses pop up in the least expected ways. 'Blame it on the Blacks' too quickly becomes a cry of 'blame it on the Jews.' And because no group is immune to this kind of poison, some blacks — a college professor in New York, a popular rap recording artist — wind up excreting anti-Jewish bilge." — Carl Rowan

Blacks and Jews

There is a persistent historical recognition that Blacks and Jews, by virtue of their racial and religio-cultural distinctiveness, often have been separated from the rest of humanity. This perception of historical apartness and social alienation from other societies and cultures has led both Blacks and Jews, as well as their foes, to aver a commonality between the groups, an intrinsic historical connection and existential identification reinforced by their respective histories of horrific victimization. The metaphors used to depict this relationship of common destiny and fate vary over time, but one can discover numerous Black and Jewish writers, especially in the last half century in the United States, interpreting and depicting their own community's reality by recourse to cultural, religious, and social images linked to or directly borrowed from the other group.

The heyday of historical consciousness of Black/Jewish commonality of experience and abiding unity of purpose no doubt emerged during the late 1950s and through much of the 1960s, as a historic Black/Jewish civil rights alliance was forged that not only framed itself in this historical Black/Jewish understanding, but which also interpreted the entire history of American Black/Jewish relations in this mutually fulfilling and supportive historiographic light. Students of American culture, however, are clearly aware that, for a variety

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher; Zvi R. Marom, Associate Editor; Mark Ami-El, Managing Editor. 13 Tel-Hai St., Jerusalem, 92107, Israel; Tel. 02-619281, Fax 972-2-619112. ISSN: 0334-4096.

of reasons, this Black/Jewish alliance has fractured over the last two decades, and that the image of these two minority groups working in harmonious unison is dismissed as myth, particularly in some quarters of the black intelligentsia. Some commentators have even challenged the alliance's putative existence at the very outset, while repudiating the notion of any significant Black/Jewish historical unity in the past, and questioning the utility of any current Black/Jewish interactions. Even "mainstream" Black organizations seem less inclined to foster Black/Jewish dialogue nowadays, as the consciousness of Black assertiveness, an independent Black agenda, and the power of more radical and nationalist groups have made their presence felt in the African American communities. Not only have Black/Jewish relations foundered in sometimes heated ideological polemics and national and foreign policy debates between the two groups these last twenty years or so, but passions have on occasion tragically given way to violence, as the events in Crown Heights, New York City in the summer of 1991 — whose repercussions are felt to this day — have demonstrated only too well.

It is against this background of deteriorating relationships between American Blacks and Jews that the educational experiment described below should be read and evaluated. It represents the efforts of two professors trying to bring light to a highly charged relationship that could benefit from some earnest and honest clarification.

A Course at the University of Cincinnati

During January-March 1991, Vibert White from the Department of African American Studies and I introduced a jointly-taught course at the University of Cincinnati: "African American/Jewish Relations in the United States." We did so without much fanfare but with admitted trepidation, quite conscious of venturing into uncharted waters on an urban campus, approximately 10 percent Black, that was in the throes of debating the merits of establishing an African American Cultural and Research Center, the wisdom of mandated courses on ethnic diversity, and the challenge of "politically correct" thinking.

We were cognizant of at least two precedents for the teaching of this topic on college campuses: Julius Lester's course at the University of Massachussets, Amherst, and David Schoem's at the University of Michigan, each taught several times during the 1980s, but neither of which seemed to have our particular historical and pedagogic orientation. Certainly, neither offered students the radically divergent background of faculty as did ours, which saw an Orthodox Jew, myself, sharing the teaching load with a Black nationalist who is an identifying Muslim. As it turned out, however our backgrounds may have impinged on course content and approach, our ability to work together effectively, to interact positively in the classroom, even "disagreeing agreeably" in front of our students, in and of itself provided a valuable model for intergroup communication.

The opening class discussed basic assumptions as to how people form judgments of others and why, and then dealt with the reasons for focusing on Black/Jewish relations and how this relationship differs in fascinating ways from the interaction of other groups in American society. White and I then presented separate classes on the "state of the union" in African American and Jewish communities, concentrating on what we thought all white students should know about African American self-understanding and what Blacks should understand about Jewish self-perceptions. The aim was, first, to contend with accepted stereotypes and myths and, more generally, to provide the briefest necessary historical background on both groups. Class time on these subjects, as it turned out, was entirely insufficient; we quickly realized that the groups of students in our course knew very little about each other's history, although more Jewish students were familiar with some aspects of Black history than the reverse.

Subsequent topics covered the history of mutual Black/Jewish perceptions and interactions from colonial times to World War I, and traced such themes as: Jews and slavery; the image of Blacks among Jews in the North and South; Blacks' perception of Jews as fellow sufferers, liberated slaves of the Old Testament, Christ-killers, and models for Blacks to emulate; and particular attitudes to Jews of Black leaders such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. These subjects were followed by an analysis of black life during the 1920s and 1930s, the Harlem Renaissance, Black urban development in the North, the emerging movements of Black nationalism and the Black Hebrews, as well as key personalities interacting with Jews, such as Marcus Garvey and Noble Drew Ali. We then focused on the Jewish/Black encounter between the wars, which included aspects of individual, institutional, and cultural cooperation and confrontation, set especially in the urban centers of the North and Midwest that witnessed the simultaneous substantial trans-Atlantic East European immigration and settlement from the late nineteenth century and Black northern migration from the American South.

The phenomenon of Jewish philanthropic assistance to Black causes was scrutinized, as were the underlying causes of urban race riots, such as those in Harlem in the 1930s. The course then examined World War II and its impact on Black/Jewish relations, followed by the legal defense of civil rights and the dominance of the NAACP and the National Urban League in the 1950s, and the forging of a Black/Jewish civil rights alliance into the 1960s with its initial camaraderie giving way to alienation as the Black Power movement emerged. The last weeks of the course dealt with the 1970s and Affirmative Action issues and legal cases; the increasing prominence of the Black Muslims and their impact on Black attitudes to Jews; Israeli policies vis-a-vis Palestinians and South Africa; the Andrew Young affair; national and international developments in the 1980s and their impact on Black/Jewish relations; as well as the activities of Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan and how they impinged on Black/Jewish affairs. The closing session discussed current division and consensus between Blacks and Jews on specific issues, and assessed future possibilities and directions of Black/Jewish relations in general.

100 Years of Empathy and Distrust

Based on our own understanding of the historical relations between Jews and blacks, White and I decided to demonstrate to students the enormous diversity of views among Jews and Blacks concerning the Black/Jewish relationship *at all times* throughout the last 100 years or so, and that some Jews and some blacks at any given point in the historical continuum of the last century expressed either empathy or distrust, a desire for cooperation or distance, anti-Semitism or philo-Semitism, racism or Black advocacy. The simplistic historiographical construct and oft-repeated popular belief that there existed an entirely positive relationship between Blacks and Jews that progressed in linear fashion culminating in the civil rights alliance between the two groups in the 1960s only to be dashed by Black nationalism and extremism is just that — simplistic.

Quite revealing about current student attitudes were the written responses to questions posed in a handout at one meeting, which queried: Do you have any perceptions of the current state of Black/Jewish relations in the United States? In your opinion, are group relations poor, fair, or good? What issues, if any, divide Blacks and Jews? What issues, if any, unite Blacks and Jews? More than half the class felt current relations were poor, slightly less than half thought them fair, and two (one Black and one Jewish student) felt them to be good. Expectedly, black students cited Jewish attitudes to Affirmative Action, Zionism, Jewish attacks against Jesse Jackson, the Jews' economic exploitation of minorities, and their desire for political and socio-economic control as basic reasons for divisions between the groups, while common Black and Jewish histories of suffering, of being minority groups, of partnership in civil rights activities, and the common spiritual heritage of Jews and Blacks were listed as factors promoting Black/Jewish unity. For their part, Jewish students noted the strident rhetoric of Jackson, Farrakhan, and Black anti-Semitism generally as major causes of intergroup strife, while they too echoed Black student perceptions about the central conditions leading to intergroup cooperation and mutual help, pointing to Black and Jewish histories of persecution and the two groups' civil rights alliances.

As the course went on, several Black nationalist voices in the class articulated, almost always politely but nonetheless forcefully, most of the attitudes to Jews and Zionism, Affirmative Action, and Black nationalism typically associated with the more radical elements in contemporary Black culture. Some of the older, less ideologically passionate Black students, however, voiced great disdain for Louis Farrakhan and even for Affirmative Action, because of its stigma of providing Blacks with special favors and the consequent devaluation of all genuine Black achievement. In marked contrast, Jewish students in the class evinced a kind of genteel liberalism; they were much less ideologically attuned and presented no aggressive political agenda, save for their emotional commitment to Israel and rejection of Black anti-Semitism that they perceived in contemporary Black culture.

Student Interaction: Does Exposure Lead to Understanding?

How did these disparate student groups interact? To be sure, not everyone was willing to speak at all times on all issues, but almost everyone participated in class discussions at one time or another; five or six of the students proved most vocal. Once the ice was broken in the course, heated one-on-one discussions frequently continued in the classroom and extended for 15-20 minutes after class sessions had concluded, breaking up only because another course had to begin. It was truly thrilling to hear the room abuzz with excited student conversations at this time, and to observe the spontaneous, animated post-class dialogues. It was moments like these that made me feel that something of real educational value was taking place.

Intergroup dialogue, however, should not be confused with intergroup agreement. The serious disagreements that arose in class reminded one that the oft-repeated assumption that group propinquity and more intimate exposure to different peoples necessarily lead to mutual understanding and the breaking of stereotypes is by no means universally true and, in fact, often represents but a pious, facile hope. Intergroup contacts just as easily can lead to the opposite phenomenon, the reinforcing of existing negative assumptions about the other, or validating for each the differences that already are perceived to exist.

A few examples of especially explosive topics that erupted in sharp differences of opinion demonstrate how insuperable some cultural-intellectual barriers are, and how group perceptions and convictions are not swayed — and ought not willy-nilly to be expected to be swayed — by intergroup contact.

In one class, an audio tape of a speech given by Louis Farrakhan on October 7, 1985 at Madison Square Garden was played to introduce students to the message of economic self-sufficiency that he advocates for African Americans. In the course of the speech, Farrakhan made highly contentious comments about Jews, rhetorically linking their hatred of Jesus and alleged killing of prophets to their hatred of him and alleged desire to do away with him. To the uproarious applause of his wildly cheering audience, the Muslim Minister Farrakhan, like Christian preachers of old, invoked biblical Scripture as an anti-Jewish text, placing himself as the next intended victim of the Jews; he, however, fulminated that he would not be victimized.

When the tape was finished, one of the ablest and most astute of the Jewish students, a committed liberal in both politics and religion as well as a morally conscious social activist, interrupted the eerie silence of the room and, with a quivering voice reflecting emotional anxiety, quietly asked the class the following question: "Did you all hear what I heard, the obnoxious and outlandish anti-Semitism of the man?" The most outspoken Black nationalist in the class immediately replied, "What anti-Semitism? Farrakhan is simply stating what he believes to be true." Then one of the older non-radical Black women piped in, "Why are Black male leaders always put down?" The ensuing discussion revealed not only the deep chasm in cultural understanding, but the gap in the *possibility* of mutual understanding. It underscored starkly the degree to which people of different cultural backgrounds can hear the same words, confront the same data, and yet come to diametrically opposing interpretations of that data. This in turn poses a fundamental and in some sense an even more troubling educational question: can individuals deeply steeped in different cultures really understand each other? Why should we think so?

A second discussion that polarized students concerned Andrew Young's resignation as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. To a person, Black students argued that Young was unfairly forced to resign, primarily due to Jewish political pressure and undue Jewish political influence on Middle East issues in the corridors of American political power. They further contended that Black leaders in public life were uniformly held to higher standards, resulting in notorious double standards being applied to meritorious Blacks that prevented their advancement. The Jewish students countered this general supposition by citing the cases of Spiro Agnew, Richard Nixon, Abe Fortas, Earl Butz, Robert Bork, Gary Hart, and Jim Wright — all white males — who, for various reasons, were forced out of their respective offices or would-be offices. All to no avail; these counter examples did not seem to make a dent in these Black students' understanding, and the impasse here remained unbridgeable.

The third example deals with an incident that occurred in the concluding class. I had presented a critical analysis of what really bothered Jews about Jackson and Farrakhan, namely their thoughtless adoption, as Jews understand it, of Third World rhetoric suffused with anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish sentiments. As the most militant of the Black nationalist students rebutted my analysis, he launched into a strident pastiche of standard anti-Zionist, anti-imperialist rhetoric, quite befitting the organization to which he belonged, the All-African People's Revolutionary Party of Kwame Toure (formerly, Stokely Carmichael). When he finished, he was asked from where he got his information about Zionism, to which he replied, "Actually, only from the propaganda of the All-African People's Revolutionary Party. I probably do need to get more information." For me, this was a glorious revelatory moment: an avowed Black nationalist publicly acknowledging the limitations of his knowledge of Zionism! Yet as part of his final paper, this same student showed nothing of his apparent willingness to be exposed to alternative perspectives about Zionism. Rather, in an essay entitled, "Anti-Zionism Does Not Mean Anti-Semitism," he rehashed all the basic distortions and malicious slanders about Zionism intimately associated with his Revolutionary Party, signalling me that his comments in class about becoming more familiar with Zionism were but a sham.

These three incidents frame the Black students as proactive, the Jewish students as reactive. The stories accurately reflect not only what happened, but also the tone and initiating impulse of socio-cultural criticism in the class, which invariably emanated from among the Black students. The reason is simple. The Jewish students, as mentioned, were not ideologically oriented except for their general commitment to Israel and repudiation of anti-Semitism from whatever quarters it is found. Most were stereotypical white liberals who challenged neither the social-cultural status quo of American nor American Jewish societies, and who favored an improvement in the conditions of African Americans in American culture. They genuinely sympathized with the plight of American Blacks as "liberals" are wont to do. On the other hand, the Black nationalist students condemned the status quo of the African American position in America and, as well, the perceived Jewish power and control in American life generally and in foreign and domestic policy-making in particular. Their indictment of the status quo was to be expected.

What Did the Students Learn?

How did students evaluate the course? More importantly, what did they think they had learned? Based on the answers to the evaluation questionnaire and from other sources, the course seems to have met with overwhelming favor among Black and Jewish students alike; only two thought it was but an average university course.

What did students report they valued most? Many acknowledged that they learned an enormous amount about the history of Black/Jewish relations and about African American and American Jewish culture. But what seemed to make an even greater impression on them was the concrete opportunity to interact with people of different backgrounds and views. Some cited their personal growth through the exposure to and understanding of varied perspectives. In fact, some suggested that they were uplifted by the mere fact of intergroup dialogue, which they claimed was impossible to achieve in most other university courses. As one of the more radical black students put it, "This is what a university education should be. One of the most beautiful things coming out of this class is how it allows us to dialogue." This refrain, in one formulation or another, was echoed by most of the Black and Jewish students in the course. Indeed, the one common complaint on almost all student evaluations scored the lack of adequate time for in-class discussion.

Were these affirmations of the course's profound personal impact really true? Did the students really mean what they said? It is hard to know for sure, but at the very least, one can hope that the course, if recalled in the future, will evoke positive memories of once satisfying academic intergroup relationships. In these times of increasing rather than diminishing racial polarization both in society and on university campuses, perhaps even this small contribution to intergroup understanding is not to be sneered at.

Still, the sobering side of the Black/Jewish interchange in our classroom and the real difficulty in coming to consensus on significant, divisive issues was beautifully captured by one student who, in response to the question about what he learned in the course, answered: "1) preconceived notions are generally wrong; 2) a person will not change unless he wants to; 3) understanding another person and that person's point of view from *his vantage point* and not your own can be very difficult; 4) no group of people is monolithic. [Therefore] there are no stereotypes that are valid." This student's incisive comments exemplify his recognition of the inherent pitfalls in attempting to achieve intergroup rapprochement.

Pedagogic Implications

What were the pedagogic implications of the course? First, Vibert White and I proved to ourselves that such a course could be taught by the simple fact that we did so. Students accumulated a world of information about Blacks and Jews and their interrelationships from multiple perspectives, which, after all, was our primary mission. As a history offering, moreover, the course was boldly imaginative, intellectually sound, and thought-provoking. If one believes that one of the preeminent goals of university education lies in fostering communication, regardless of whether it modifies perspectives and/or behavior, then by that criterion alone our course was inordinately successful.

My unease and frustration with the course, however, stems from dissatisfaction over what did not appear to get accomplished. In a course dedicated to studying the history of an intergroup relationship, *optimally*, I would have liked to have seen some signs that a multidimensional, critical historical analysis would have contributed to the breaking down of unacceptable stereotypes and false ideas, but there was no evidence that it accomplished that. Our course did not change anybody's mind on fundamentally divisive issues between the two groups and it is not even clear — notwithstanding student protestations to the contrary —

how sensitized each student group may have become to the other's concerns.

In addition, this course raised for me profound pedagogic questions: about the validity and utility of historical generalizations, about the roadblocks that cultural interference places in the way of the educational process, about the very nature and process of learning itself and the manner in which humanities instructors ought to teach in cross-cultural frameworks.

The vast primary and secondary literature on Black/Jewish relations demonstrates time and again how generalizations made by Blacks or Jews about the other group and about Black/Jewish relations are a function of individual idiosyncratic experiences with members of the other group and/or inherited wisdom about that group via in-group sources that a person accepts and trusts. One need but read Jonathan Kaufman's *Broken Alliance*, which records the differing perceptions of Black/Jewish relations by three Blacks and three Jews, all of disparate backgrounds and all having had disparate relationships with Blacks and Jews, to see how important the subjects' personal positive or negative encounters with Blacks or Jews were for their universalized generalizations about the two groups as a whole. This I found to be almost uniformly true about Black or Jewish autobiographies dealing with Black/Jewish interactions.

To be sure, this observation that human beings create conceptual generalizations and universal propositions on the basis of personal experiences is commonplace. But as I confronted this phenomenon repeatedly in the literature and alerted our students to it, the question begged to be answered: whose generalizations can you trust? What was the reality of Black/Jewish relations at any given point in time and how would we know for sure? And how does one teach the material and come to any useful, broad conclusions? For example, were Blacks more or less anti-Semitic in the 1920s and 1930s than Whites? Were Jewish philanthropists aiding Black causes really exemplary of Jewish social-ethical impulses of the Jews as a group, or did they have their own socio-political agendas? Which judgments about these and so many other sensitive issues were to be deemed reliable?

To sensitize students to the issue of problematic generalizations, we tried constantly to make them appreciate the distinction between data and interpretation of data, to inculcate in them the realization that select attitudes and preconceptions born from differentiated cultural, racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds and brought to bear on the data will affect the generalizations and interpretations that ensue.

One example of this process is very telling. Within the context of evaluating Southern Jewry's relationship to Blacks in the South in the nineteenth century, I once posed the following question to the class: If the Jewish Jacobs Drugstore chain of Atlanta, which at the turn of the century pledged "courteous treatment to ALL," but which could not serve Blacks and Whites at the same counter because of segregation, opened a drugstore in a black neighborhood catering exclusively to Negroes, should it be judged negatively for pandering to a racist system, or praised for working within the system in a manner benefitting Blacks, or accused of cleverly using the system to reap economic gain, or any combination of these three options?

This discussion found students disagreeing and emerging with contrary generalizations. Blacks tended to see Jewish racism in Jacobs Drugstore, whereas Jews showed a greater degree of empathy for its predicament and judged it positively. The important thing I stressed, however, once we all noticed how the class split on this issue, was not the actual differences in judgment rendered, but rather the need to ascertain the perspectives and modes of analysis that led the Black students to one conclusion and the Jewish students to another. Even if the students could not agree as to which criteria ought to be invoked to reach a judgment — an absolutist sense of justice in which anything short of full ideal equality is racist (which Blacks argued), or evaluating historical phenomena with more relativistic scales of justice taking into account what is realistically possible within any specific socio-historical reality (which Jews supported) — the fact that the two groups came to realize that they were examining the questions from different value orientations led them at least to understand why it was they were in disagreement, no small matter in intergroup affairs.

This analytic exercise, and others like it, just reinforced my belief that faculty may not be able to reconcile different interpretations of texts or perceptions of reality, nor ought they be expected to do so; but at least we ought to be able to teach students to apprehend the different standards of judgment that are explicitly or, more often, implicitly applied to a particular phenomenon by individuals and/or groups and the reasons for that.

Where "Jew" is a Bad Word

The culturally determined usage of language and the potential antithetical group decodings of the same term or phrase, possibly leading to erroneous interpreta-

tions or even grave misunderstandings among people of different backgrounds, may best be illustrated by an experience I had in another course. At the conclusion of the opening class on Modern Jewish Civilization, two Black students approached me and inquired whether I objected to being called a "Jew." Puzzled, I answered that I did not, and proceeded to give them a grand overview of the word's etymological history and meaning. I later asked myself what could have prompted the question and finally guessed what might have happened: in their community and/or circle of friends, the word "Jew" is a horribly negative term, replete with unsavory connotations, and perhaps used synonymously with a cheat and/or with someone who takes advantage of another. From their perspective and cultural worldview, it was very logical for honest, curious individuals to wonder how I could possibly label myself with a word that held such blatantly offensive implications. I recall thinking at the time, fully one year before the Black/Jewish course, that if Blacks and Jews could not even name each other comfortably, how could they possibly communicate on more substantive levels. Needless to say, this phenomenon of cultural interference impinging on even elemental levels of communication was seen often in this class as well.

This course on Black/Jewish relations provoked a third set of pedagogic issues, causing me to reflect on the process of learning itself and what we as faculty in the humanities do to foster learning, especially in cross-cultural contexts. White and I had predicated our course on the principle of diversity. Readings spanned the vast spectrum from liberal to conservative, radical to moderate, nationalist to integrationist, those hostile to or cooperative with Black/Jewish interactions from within both Black and Jewish circles. By forcing students to become familiar with a broad range of opinions and sources on all themes covered, and by not espousing any ideological vision ourselves, we hoped students would come away with, first, an appreciation for the incredible diversity of opinion on most Black/Jewish issues, and second, with the realization that judgments on these relations are not simple and should not be reached hastily.

Yet, despite our best educational intentions, students repeatedly gravitated to those views confirming their prior beliefs, resisting the opportunity to consider fully new, wider perspectives. Thus, for example, several Black students mined the literature and discovered all their suspicions about Jewish power and control confirmed, which they brought up in class and outlined in their papers. When I asked them what most impressed them about Henry Feingold's *Midrash on American Jewish History*, which was assigned reading for Black students, one young African American woman responded directly, "Jewish power"; other Black students nodded in assent. All this despite Feingold's message of the lack of Jewish control and power to affect American policy when it mattered most, during the Holocaust; all this despite his contention that ethnic groups cannot really influence American policy to any significant degree unless their desires are perceived congruent with the administration's definition of the common national interest. The students largely read in such a way as to validate previously held points of view.

Not surprisingly, this same young woman, responding to the question on the course evaluation form as to how the course had affected her perceptions of Black/Jewish relations, answered that "my feelings about the Jewish position in this society and towards Blacks have been reinforced because I believe Jews act solely on their self-interests." Tangentially I would add that this theme — that Jews' historical interactions with Blacks were motivated solely by Jewish self-interest, that Jews in fact are incapable of altruistic feelings and of selfless, socially progressive behavior, and that Jewish actions that help Blacks and Jews simultaneously somehow are tainted and to be criticized — is part of a contemporary Black nationalist ideology increasingly heard not only on the streets but to some extent in more mainstream Black historiography. In this scenario, Jews are put into a double blind: they are required to be either angels and pure idealists, or they are judged selfish. Moreover, the legitimacy and approbation of separate group agendas that nonetheless lead to a convergence of interests is denied, and any such instance is interpreted as a Jewish misuse of African Americans. Some of our students actually argued this in class, including one of the Black nationalists who candidly remarked that he was trying to "figure [me] out," trying to understand "what I wanted out of this course." Apparently, since it was axiomatic that Jews act only from self-gain, I must have been using this course for some — heretofore unknown — personal advantage.

Learning to Inhabit Another World

Teaching this course on Black/Jewish relations underscored for me once again the complexity of the teaching and learning process. Moreover, my experience has led me to conclude that those involved in university curricular reforms promoting cultural diversity must be mindful not merely of the types of courses

that ought to be included in a restructured curriculum, but also of the dilemmas of learning in an intercultural context. For some students, the potential for broadened perspectives is never actualized, as they uncover from among the multiplicity of voices in the gamut of literature and ideas to which they are exposed themes and convictions corroborating their accepted beliefs. The questions must be posed: Can anything, indeed, ought anything be done about this process of learning, especially within sensitive intergroup contexts? And if so, what?

American institutions of higher learning clearly are dedicated to the proposition that people of different socio-intellectual and cultural backgrounds, whether native to America or foreign, of this century or centuries past, can indeed mix, converse, and learn to understand each other, which is why universities at the moment still strive to be the melting pots of American culture. If this were not true, the arts and humanities of universities would be rendered obsolete and absurd. If this were not true, universities would not trouble themselves with attracting diverse student bodies. If this were not true, "general education" initiatives calling for the acknowledgment of cultural diversity and even mandated courses in these areas would be pointless.

But there is an implicit philosophical and socio-psychological assumption undergirding this belief, namely that there exists a universal logic and rationality that enables human beings to communicate with one another and to comprehend each other despite the social, cultural, ethnic, and intellectual forces that profoundly separate them. Implicit too is the notion that if only cultural differences were explained rationally and logically, anyone could understand them. But is that claim for the universal communicability of ideas universally true, or is knowledge and understanding of reality so ethnicized and tribalized, so shaped by particular subgroup experiences, that real communication between different peoples is severely impeded if not made impossible for many, if not most, students?

Henry Louis Gates, W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, has written: "No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world." I certainly do not quarrel with that statement, neither as educational ideal nor with the fact that for some it is an ideal that is realized. However, based on my experience in this Black/Jewish relations course, I am concerned that this ability to have students "inhabit another world" is not being sufficiently cultivated, that it is an approach to life realized only by a few, and that we in the universities still need to think carefully about how we can assist more of our students to fulfill this educational ideal. For example, I ask myself, did our Black and Jewish students really penetrate the other world, and what could we have done to better facilitate that process? Simply mandating cultural diversity courses as some universities are currently doing by itself will not resolve the larger problem, because once students are in the classroom, the substantial obstacles to intergroup and intercultural communication only begin to be felt.

What then can be done? If my experience in this course has taught me anything, it has left me with some functional methodological suggestions by which to address the issue: If we wish to attempt to sensitize students to other cultures and to the delicate matter of cultural conflicts, if we wish, additionally, to teach them how to interact with individuals from different societal groups, then it is essential to instruct our charges on how to critically evaluate generalizations and to distinguish between data and interpretation of data; to make them aware of the possibilities of cultural interference on multiple levels in group interactions; and to excite them sufficiently to cause them to want to taste new ideas from an inclusive educational smorgasbord, even if it seems unappetizing at first and inconsistent with acquired tastes. All this is easier said than done, I concede, but ultimately a worthwhile endeavor.

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Benny Kraut, Professor of Jewish Studies, Director of the Judaic Studies Program at the University of Cincinnati, and holder of the University's two most prestigious teaching awards, is currently on sabbatical at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. A much fuller version of this report, detailing course structure, methodology, and content, appeared in the *Cincinnati Judaica Review*, vol. III (1992). This *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints* is based on his presentation at the Jerusalem Center Fellows Forum and is