

Support For Israel: African-Americans, Jews Share Common History

The Jewish people and the African-American community have a shared history of affliction, persecution and enslavement. Just as the Jews were slaves in Egypt and suffered much persecution throughout their 2,000 years living in a Diaspora, so were the African-Americans enslaved and endured much discrimination in America.

For this reason, many Jews sympathized with the African-American struggle for freedom, and this sympathy would lead to many prominent African-American leaders sympathizing with Zionism. Indeed, both African-American and Jewish leaders saw parallels between African-American history in America and Jewish history.

Thus, both the African-American and Jewish community have common values, illustrating why the African-American community should support Israel.

Due to the fact that many African-Americans could emotionally relate to the Exodus story, as popularized in the African-American spiritual "Go Down Moses," and that Zion was always a common theme in African-American churches, a report published by the Simon Wiesenthal Center asserts that many African-Americans supported Israel in the days leading up to Israel becoming a state.

. Du Bois, a founder of the NAACP, for example, drew much inspiration from Zionism. He declared, "The African movement must mean to us what the Zionist movement must mean to the Jews." In 1921, he blamed the murder of Jews by "ruthless and bloodthirsty evil-doers" on the British, not the establishment of Jewish communities in the Holy Land. And in the 1940's,

Dubois was a very strong advocate for the U.N. Partition Plan, arguing that African-Americans should "support the fight for a free Israel" since it was linked to the obligation of the Jewish people to help out with the struggle for a "free Africa."

Du Bois had very little sympathy for the Arab cause because countries like Saudi Arabia engaged in slavery still in the 1940s. Slavery would not be formally abolished in Saudi Arabia until 1962. Indeed, the Arabs' support for the African slave trade predated European involvement and some Arab countries, like Mauritania, continue to practice slavery to date. Ralph Bunche, another prominent African-American, had told Menechem Begin in a meeting, "I can understand you. I am also a member of a persecuted minority." In 1948, the NAACP passed a resolution stating, "The valiant struggle of the people of Israel for independence serves an inspiration to all persecuted people throughout the world. We hail the establishment of the new State of Israel and welcome it in the family of nations."

Yet, African-American support for Israel did not stop following the establishment of the state of Israel. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. himself declared, "When people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews. You are talking anti-Semitism." In another instance, he stated, "There is something in the very nature of the universe which is on the side of Israel in its struggle with every Egypt." In 1967, King signed onto a petition calling upon former President Johnson to support Israel. And just before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, he claimed, "I see Israel, and never mind saying it, as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can almost be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security and that security must be a reality."

More recently, in 1990, Jesse Jackson stated that he

recognized Zionism was a national liberation movement. African-American activists fighting against apartheid, such as Randall Robinson, were furthermore inspired by the reparations that Germany paid to Israel following the Holocaust, claiming that he wished the same for the African and African-American descendants of people who were victimized by the slave trade.

Indeed, the struggle for African-American freedom was intimately related to the desire of the oppressed Jewish people to establish a national home in Eretz Yisrael.

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