

THE 1968 NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL CRISIS

Eden Riebling

In the fall of 1968, tensions between the Black and Jewish communities in New York City built to a crisis that brought a racial and cultural reckoning.¹ The resistance of a predominantly Jewish teachers' union to Black-run schools inflamed tensions between the city's Black and Jewish populations, but the dispute's effects spread beyond those groups and beyond New York.² Because the crisis involved the United States's largest city, largest school district, largest local union, and largest Black and Jewish populations, it became top national news—and the news coverage, in turn, influenced the story itself.³ The conflict between competing liberal visions—an Old Left rooted in Jewish humanism, and a New Left asserting Black Power—climaxed in a series of teacher strikes, forcing many people in the city to choose sides.⁴ Those reassessments eroded trust between teachers and families, between the labor and civil rights movements, and especially between Blacks and Jews. The racial antagonisms the episode unleashed led observers to call it the “most debated”⁵ and “most racially polarizing event in the city's history,”⁶ which “ripped apart New York City as nothing has before or since,”⁷ producing “the most serious crisis confronting

Eden Riebling is a Senior at the Horace Mann School in Bronx, New York, where she wrote this paper for Emily Straus's U.S. History Since 1945 course in the 2023/2024 academic year.

American Jews since the end of World War II.”⁸ Historians have called the conflict a “breakpoint”⁹ in a longstanding Black-Jewish civil rights alliance,¹⁰ and it remains a focus of research on urban race relations.¹¹ By intensifying a conflict between divergent liberal visions, the 1968 school crisis not only frayed Black-Jewish relations, but fractured the coalitional liberalism that had predominated in American politics since the New Deal.

Status Quo Ante: The Black-Jewish Alliance

A Black-Jewish alliance had been core to American liberalism since the early decades of the 20th century.¹² Cooperation had seemed natural for two groups with strikingly similar histories of oppression and suffering. Both were pariahs, formerly enslaved, murdered, otherized, ostracized, victims of ethnic prejudice; both endured stereotyping by ethnic majorities, were equated with the devil and called sexually licentious; both had been separated from their homelands and dispersed into communities where they were segregated (the word “ghetto” originally meant the Jewish quarter of Renaissance Venice); both faced discrimination in employment, education, and housing; and both responded to pariah status by attempting to assimilate.¹³ Some Jews shortened or changed their names, others their noses, while Black magazines carried ads for creams to lighten skin and straighten hair.¹⁴

On the Jewish side, an impetus to Black allyship evolved from a reflexive commitment to liberal causes, grounded in both religious tradition and socialist ideology, which became part of American-Jewish identity.¹⁵ Many Jews believed that their efforts for the disadvantaged generally, and Blacks especially, set them apart from white Protestant-Christians.¹⁶ When asked what it meant to be a good Jew in a 1968 survey, 44 percent of American Jews said one must “work for equality for Negroes,” and only one percent said it meant one must follow the *Torah*.¹⁷

This golden age of Black-Jewish alliances lasted from 1955, when Jewish lawyers argued the Black side in *Brown v. Board of Education*, through 1964, when white supremacists murdered Jewish civil rights workers Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman.¹⁸ From

the mid-to-late 1960s, however, events induced American Jews to disavow their ethnic marginality and to identify as whites.¹⁹ As the Black civil rights struggle evolved from a nonviolent southern to a militant northern context, the basis for Black-Jewish cooperation began to erode.

Jewish Progress

Jews seemed “white” because their economic and social progress in the United States presented a stark contrast to Black stasis. Sociologist Nathan Glazer foresaw in late 1964 that passage of the Civil Rights Act would pose a “new challenge to pluralism,” and to the Black-Jewish alliance, because Blacks and Jews had “different capacities to take advantage of the opportunities that are truly in large measure open to all.”²⁰

For Blacks, the diaspora seemed permanent, but for Jews, it had ended in the creation of two homelands, one in the new state of Israel and the other in the American middle class. In Europe, Jews were victims, but in the United States, they were a success story. By 1939, two Jews sat on the high court; Jews were making outsized contributions to American literature, art, cinema, theater, music, and academia; and Jews predominated as teachers and administrators in the New York City education system, gradually displacing Irish Catholics.²¹ After Auschwitz, most remaining barriers to Jewish membership in the American establishment eroded, a form of victim-privilege not afforded Blacks. Perhaps most markedly, in the 1950s, Jews’ “whiteness” allowed them admission into Levittown and other racially segregated suburbs, a development which pressurized relations between urban Blacks and Jews.²²

In New York and other cities, Jews had been the main non-Blacks whom many Blacks encountered in daily life.²³ But as more than a million whites left New York City in the 1950s and 1960s, replaced by an almost equal number of nonwhites, many Jewish parents became uneasy with the changing racial composition of city public schools.²⁴ “When I lined up in the first grade at my school the first day of school I was the only Caucasian child,” recalled Jay Eskin, who grew up Jewish in Brownsville. “My mother

said, 'This is ridiculous. We have to move.' She wasn't prejudiced but she didn't want me to go to an all African-American school."²⁵ As prosperous New York Jews joined the "white flight" to the suburbs, the less affluent Jews who remained became, by some measures, more prejudiced than other whites. More Jews than other whites, for instance, told pollsters they would be upset if whites were bused into schools in Black areas.²⁶ Perhaps typical was a sixty-five-year-old Jewish Bronx woman, who grouched that the "old neighborhood is going down with all these Puerto Ricans and Negroes moving in."²⁷

By 1966, Jewish evolution from white-ish to white could be seen in an issue-based Jewish-Catholic alignment in New York City on racialized issues of law and order.²⁸ Polls showed that Jews and white Catholics voted overwhelmingly against a review board for NYPD misconduct, part of a larger white backlash against Black demands.²⁹ "I think people are happier with their own kind," a 55-year-old Brooklyn Jewish shopkeeper told Harris pollsters. "They are more at ease, more comfortable. I am with Jews. Let them be with their own Negroes. We can't mix anymore." A 26-year-old Orthodox Jew added that racial segregation was "what they [Blacks] want. It's best for them. This system of ours does not suit them."³⁰

Black Power

Many Blacks themselves said that the American system did not suit them. When James Baldwin warned in 1963 that Blacks could not "respect, let alone adopt" white values, he captured the mood of a rising culture of Black Power.³¹ The movement drew inspiration from Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, who since the early 1930s had preached an anti-white, anti-Jewish, and anti-Christian message based on a radicalized interpretation of the *Koran*. He advocated Black secession into a separate American nation, opposed racial intermarriage, and called for Black students to study a Black-centric curriculum with Black teachers in all-Black schools.³² Muhammad's chief of staff and protégé, Malcolm X, took that gospel of militant separatism to Harlem, where he pronounced that "the white man is the devil,"

and proclaimed that “if it must take violence to get the Black man his human rights in this country, I’m for violence...no matter what the consequences.”³³

After Malcolm X’s 1965 assassination by Black Muslim rivals, two main contenders emerged for the mantle of Black militancy. One was the Black Panther Party, an armed Black Maoist militia founded in Oakland, California, in October 1966, which valorized violence and vowed to “topple the reactionary regime in this country.”³⁴ The other prominent candidate for militant leadership was Stokely Carmichael, a philosophy major from the Bronx, who, as the head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in June 1966 coined the phrase Black Power, explaining: “When you talk about Black Power, you talk of building a movement that will smash everything that Western Civilization has created.”³⁵ Although Martin Luther King and other Black civil rights leaders denounced the militant trend—Roy Wilkins of the NAACP called Black Power “a reverse Hitler, a reverse Ku Klux Klan”—Black moderates seemed behind the curve as the songs of freedom riders gave way to the smoke of the 1965 Watts riot.³⁶

Jewish civil rights activists, for their part, took the “reverse Hitler” charges seriously, because Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and Carmichael all traded freely in antisemitic tropes.³⁷ Black anti-semitism became an especially sore spot with Jews after the Six-Day War in June of 1967, an event which both zionized American Jews and prompted strident anti-Zionist statements by Carmichael, the SNCC, the Panthers, and the Black Caucus at the 1967 Conference on New Politics in Chicago.³⁸ The result, as Carmichael’s colleague Clayborne Carson recalled, was a “Black-Jewish conflict” that “was hardly visible before 1966,” and which Jewish leaders initially minimized, but which by 1968 led many Jews to fear that Black militants with necklaces of machine-gun bullets would foment pogroms.³⁹ Those fears became perhaps most acute in New York City, where anti-Jewish invective had long been an aspect of Black nationalism, where resentment of Jewish economic power had been a factor in the popularity of Malcolm X, and where Black-Jewish tensions boiled over in a 1968 teachers’ strike.⁴⁰

Ocean Hill-Brownsville

The scene of the conflict, the school district of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn, had been the birthplace of many Jewish intellectuals.⁴¹ Jay Eskin, who became a professor at Touro College, recalled Brownsville as a poor Jewish-immigrant zone, where his great grandfather “literally sold junk from a pushcart” until the neighborhood started to change.⁴² During the 1950s, Blacks began arriving from the southern United States, sometimes at the rate of 1,200 a month, and by 1965 Brownsville was only five percent white.⁴³ In the late Sixties, Brownsville had the highest narcotics addiction rate in the country, and observers described the neighborhood as “the most disadvantaged in the city,” a no-man’s land between no man’s-lands, with blocks of burned-out shells of houses and streets littered with decaying automobile hulks.⁴⁴ Father John Powis, a white-Catholic priest who did charity work in the area, called it a “scene out of hell.”⁴⁵

The district’s schools were by reputation among New York’s worst, with reading levels far below city norms.⁴⁶ Classrooms were so overcrowded that students went to school in half-day shifts, from eight to noon or from noon to four, and during those shifts little learning went on.⁴⁷ Students remembered one teacher who read a newspaper and told the class, “Do whatever you want.”⁴⁸ Teachers recalled colleagues who arrived in the morning with radios, coffee, and cake, and who left their classrooms to place bets at the track, or locked themselves up in a room to sell insurance on the side,⁴⁹ and answered criticisms of their work by calling their students “retarded.”⁵⁰ One absentee principal had been absent for seven years.⁵¹

Fed up by these conditions, parents of color began to demand change. Dolores Torres, a Puerto Rican mother who raised four children in the district, began attending meetings of the Board of Education on Livingston Street in Lower Manhattan to complain. A meeting there on December 19, 1966 devolved into chaos when a Black mother from Brownsville tried to speak her mind, only to be ruled out of order because she had not submitted her name in advance. The Board tried to continue the meeting,

but the audience drowned them out, chanting: "Let her speak! We pay the taxes!"⁵² Torres recalled that "they started turning off the mics...and we just took over."⁵³ The parents stayed there for three days and nights, calling themselves the People's Board of Education, and demanding control over the schooling of their children.⁵⁴ As Torres recalled, "We just kept saying, 'Well, they're not representing us. Maybe we should represent ourselves.'"⁵⁵ Feeling strengthened by their stand in the meeting, the parents rose up "to make history," as one of them declared, to fight for community control of public schools.⁵⁶

The idea of community control had been promoted two year before by whites in Queens trying to stop integration.⁵⁷ Yet the idea of locally supervised schools appealed also to Black parents who had little left to lose. Attempts to integrate city schools had failed; by the mid-Sixties, classrooms were more racially and economically segregated than they had been a decade earlier; at Brownsville Junior High School (JHS) 271, the student population was just two percent white.⁵⁸ Besides being ineffective, integration seemed ideologically out of step: by reinforcing the notion that the only way for Black children to get a good education was to send them to a white school, said Black Power advocates, integration actually impeded equity.⁵⁹ The idea of Black-run schools came naturally enough to parents in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, three-quarters of whom had recently come from the south, where segregated schools made Black teachers, Black students, and Black administrators the norm.⁶⁰ Yet community control appealed also to the Mayor of New York, John Lindsay, a liberal white Republican who hoped that giving the Black poor power over their institutions would ease racial tensions. Lindsay appointed a task force to study school decentralization, led by McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation and an architect of the Vietnam War. In May 1967, pressured by the task force, the Board of Education combined seven schools from the adjacent Brooklyn neighborhoods of Ocean Hill and Brownsville into a "demonstration district" for community control.⁶¹

Parents in the district elected an interracial governing board which, in turn, placed the project in the hands of Rhody McCoy, a blue-eyed, pipe-smoking Black man who had served as the principal of a school for students with special needs.⁶² McCoy was also an old friend of Malcolm X and had often gone to Malcolm's house in Queens to talk about educational reform.⁶³ He agreed with Malcolm about the need for blacks to seize control of their own neighborhoods, schools, and lives. "When I talked to Malcolm, we had the same idea," McCoy recalled. "The schools were *not* there to teach the skills, i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic." Instead, schools should aim to awaken Black political consciousness: "Malcolm's posture, what he said from day one, was, 'Wake up.'" As McCoy put it, "A game is being run on you. This is a fraud and it's a hoax. It's designed to detour you from your goal."⁶⁴ The school system, McCoy said, was "a bastion of white domination that would never relinquish its control...I don't want to get into heavy philosophical things, but let's say 'mind control.'"⁶⁵ The line of thought was expressed in a Black educators' conference McCoy chaired, which unanimously resolved that "white middle-class values are harmful to black school children."⁶⁶ In a Ph.D. dissertation, McCoy would later attack "racist capitalist America" for making "the education of black, poor white and Third World children in this country impossible," adding that "a violent revolution is necessary to have America's public institutions serve all its people."⁶⁷ But for the moment, with Ford Foundation financial support disbursed in July 1967, McCoy called for parents in the demonstration district to control the curriculum, the grading of students, the hiring and firing of teachers, and the disciplining of disruptive children. He called the project a "last" attempt to improve the district's schools without resorting "to violent means."⁶⁸

Black parents responded with enthusiasm. The Ford grant, administered by Father Powis, paid community members to plan the demonstration project, especially by canvassing for the election of a governing board.⁶⁹ But money seems to have been an incidental motive for the parents, to whom the project symbolized a struggle for democratic power. Their white allies in the New York Civil Liberties Union said that community control meant to Black

parents what “no taxation without representation” meant to the Minuteman of the American Revolution.⁷⁰

But teachers in the new experimental district were wary. On the surface, McCoy’s proposals seemed legitimate enough: he submitted a plan in bureaucratese to the Board of Education, promising orderly periodic evaluations.⁷¹ The Black empowerment aspects, further, appealed to white liberal educators like Sandra Feldman, who had been arrested during the 1962 Route 40 Freedom Rides to desegregate restaurants on the Baltimore-Washington corridor.⁷² Yet Feldman found voting procedures for the governing board irregular. The election occurred during the summer, and so excluded vacationing teachers.⁷³ McCoy said that an “amalgamation” of college students kept track of the voting, none of whom he knew by name, and many of those elected to the governing board had been the same people who had done the electioneering. When Feldman and others asked for clarification on those points, McCoy interpreted their queries as “an attempt on our part to destroy the original intent.”⁷⁴ And although the teachers had been told that they would be a part of the project, they learned “that just wasn’t true,” recalled science teacher Fred Nauman. “Any suggestions that were made by the teachers were either disregarded or, actually, they were insulted about making them.”⁷⁵

By October 1967, the two sides began to draw their battle lines. The governing board accused white teachers and their union leaders of trying to scuttle the experiment, portraying them as “bigoted, incompetent, disinterested, obstructive, and attempting to sabotage the plan.”⁷⁶ The teachers countered with alarmed reports to their union about a mood of “extremism,” “militants,” and “Black Power.”⁷⁷ To hear the teachers tell it, young Black males, sometimes the sons of governing board members, harassed educators by coughing loudly during meetings to prevent their speaking, pushing, calling them “whitey,” even stealing their cars.⁷⁸ As the opposing positions hardened, community control—and white reaction to it—would bring New York’s Black and Jewish communities into a conflict which nearly tore the city apart.

Jewish Educators' Perspectives

Though the conflict would take crude and cruel forms, it involved a clash of lived perspectives and sincerely held ideological paradigms. McCoy's determination to bypass the city's Board of Examiners to hire Black teachers would mean the abolition of a merit-based system that Jews had used to overcome invisible quotas of corrupt Irish patronage machines.⁷⁹ Further, because the city's public-school teachers and administrators were nearly seventy percent Jewish, McCoy's calls for all-Black educators would mean fewer jobs for Jewish teachers.⁸⁰ Meanwhile the Jewish officials who predominated in the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) worried that allowing local districts to bypass the Board of Education would destroy their bargaining power.⁸¹ Union leaders also resented the tacit threat to their monopoly on expertise, warning that "the professional teacher will not continue to teach in any school or district where professional decisions are made by laymen."⁸²

The educational establishment fretted, too, that a race-based school policy would transgress the "cultural pluralism and humanism" that were the stated goals of New York City public schools.⁸³ When Bundy and the Ford Foundation recommended decentralizing the schools into thirty to sixty autonomous districts, the UFT invoked the specter of the Balkan Peninsula, where decentralization of political power had created small state units unfriendly to one another.⁸⁴ UFT President Albert Shanker became an especially outspoken opponent of the plan, calling it a "backward step" in the struggle to eliminate segregation.⁸⁵ To Shanker, decentralization amounted to a betrayal of the liberal universalism that had structured Jewish social thought since the Enlightenment—what Jewish civil rights activist Schlomo Katz called the "ideal of the ultimate unity of the race of man, the highest [ideal] that the human mind has conceived," and which the Nazis had tried to destroy.⁸⁶

Shanker and other Jewish educators' favored approach to Black America, as Jerald Podair has argued at length, followed that of Harvard sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick

Moynihan.⁸⁷ Their “Culture of Poverty” critique blamed Black problems on the “pathology” of urban Black “family structure” and lifestyle.⁸⁸ Glazer and Moynihan’s proposed solutions involved acculturation through a More Effective Schools initiative, which, conveniently enough for the teachers and their unions, meant hiring more teachers and paying them more money.⁸⁹

Black Educators’ Perspectives

The Black community’s perspective in Ocean Hill-Brownsville presented almost a polar negative of the educational establishment’s view. Black leaders like McCoy resented white power and Jewish control of education in their communities, and McCoy himself had felt professionally stymied when Jewish teachers won important promotions and better assignments.⁹⁰ McCoy resisted, too, the ideals of colorblindness expressed by Martin Luther King and by Ralph Rogers, a principal in the experimental district, who said, “I don’t care if you’re black, white, gold or polka dot... I see no color at all; all I see is education and it has no color.”⁹¹ McCoy believed it not only possible but probable that “a teacher may be competent to teach in a white, middle-class school and incompetent to teach in a black or Puerto Rican ghetto school,” making ethnicity a legitimate qualification for teaching.⁹²

McCoy and the Black reformers, including educational theorists Kenneth Clark and Preston Wilcox, answered the Culture of Poverty theory with a countercultural critique.⁹³ They blamed white-Jewish UFT pedagogy for promoting a shallow and fraudulent culture of competition, individualism, and materialism that tried to turn students of color into “Black Anglo-Saxons.”⁹⁴ Instead, Black activists valorized altruistic and collectivist values, such as “obligation to peers and community.”⁹⁵

Finally, Black Power in education was anti-humanist. Rejecting the “universalist assumptions” that had sustained Black-Jewish involvement in the leftist cause, a growing corps of Black educators deemed the ideals of a “common culture” a cover for white supremacy.⁹⁶ As Black educational activists said at a 1966 Racism in Education Conference in Washington, DC, they wanted to eschew

“universalities” for a distinct Black cultural outlook, expressed in what they called an “Afrocentric” curriculum.⁹⁷ In Ocean-Hill Brownsville, that meant abandoning the More Effective Schools Program for a pedagogy that made Black students “feel good about themselves,” as McCoy put it, through a “totally ungraded” school environment and an “Afro-American Curriculum Center.”⁹⁸

The controversial Curriculum Center was run by history teacher Les Campbell, who transferred into Ocean Hill-Brownsville after being suspended from another district for taking students to a service marking the assassination of Malcolm X. Brother Campbell, as he asked to be called, “was the only one to wear a dashiki at that time,” recalled one of his students, “and nobody knew what a dashiki was...And it was like, this guy is from another planet.”⁹⁹ During his first days on the job, Campbell put up a bulletin board in a hallway, featuring political slogans and images of Carmichael and Black Panther leader H. Rap Brown. As Campbell himself remembered, the bulletin board also included a poster of Uncle Sam, with the caption, “Uncle Sam Wants You, N—,” highlighting the United States government recruiting young Black males to fight in Vietnam “for freedom that they did not in fact have living in the United States.”¹⁰⁰ The exhibit was only up for a day or so before the UFT called a meeting about it and began agitating, unsuccessfully, for the bulletin board to be taken down.¹⁰¹ Campbell did not calm the waters by inviting representatives from the radical Black Muslim group Republic of New Africa to a district Governing Board meeting. As board member C. Herbert Oliver recounted, the group “wanted us to separate from the United States and declare Ocean Hill-Brownsville an independent state and to apply to the United Nations for membership.”¹⁰²

The resulting conflict in Brownsville, then, was cultural and ideological. In broadest terms, a white Jewish Old Left faced off against a Black Muslim-inspired New Left. The dichotomy had important exceptions: some Jewish educators just out of college backed community control, while some Black teachers told the UFT they “completely disagree but will not say anything for fear of being called Uncle Toms.”¹⁰³ But the leaders of the opposing

sides swept aside these exceptions, and the resulting collision contributed to the dramatic events that made 1968 a very tumultuous year in American history.¹⁰⁴

Racial Unrest

The assassination of Martin Luther King by a white racist on April 4 led to riots in 110 cities, causing thirty-nine deaths and providing the spark that ignited the New York schools crisis.¹⁰⁵ “The students reacted,” McCoy admitted, “because here’s a gentleman who’s talking about peace for the benefit of mankind and somebody assassinates him. And then, when they heard that it was a Caucasian who had assassinated him, it made it even worse.”¹⁰⁶ Yet in that volatile situation, some teachers in Ocean Hill-Brownsville incited their students rather than counseling calm. The day after the assassination, the Black vice principal at JHS-271, Albert Vann, called an assembly, “invited” the white teachers to leave, and then gave the microphone to Brother Campbell, who reportedly urged the students to steal from whites, adding, “If Whitey taps you on the shoulder, send him to the graveyard.”¹⁰⁷ One of the white teachers, Fred Nauman, recalled that “we came into school that morning and somebody had been very busy all night. There were signs all over the walls: ‘The whites have killed our king. We have to take revenge’...What happened was an incitement to violence really.” Nauman saw a young white woman teacher “mobbed by a bunch of youngsters, thrown down, her dress was torn, hands full of hair were pulled from her head.”¹⁰⁸ Karriema Jordan, in seventh grade at the time, remembered that “right after homeroom period was when all hell broke loose. We just threw chairs around, wrote on the walls, ‘Avenge King! Kill Whitey!’ It was almost a riot.”¹⁰⁹ After bands of students roamed the hallways, beating three white teachers and hospitalizing one with a concussion, more than 50 teachers told the UFT they would never go back to JHS 271.¹¹⁰

On May 8, while the union tried to defuse the situation, McCoy upped the ante by effectively firing thirteen teachers, one principal, and five assistant principals.¹¹¹ All but one of the dismissed personnel was Jewish.¹¹² The charges against the ter-

minated teachers included chronic lateness; excessive use of the blackboard; failure to control the class; jeopardizing children's safety; allowing students to engage in a "paint fight"; failing to decorate the classroom properly; allowing three students to play audio-visual equipment on the ceiling and walls; allowing two boys and one girl to go into a closet together; failing to stop students from running across the street to a store; using profane language in class; inflicting corporal punishment; "making inappropriate remarks to girl students"; using karate on students; "being hostile to the... demonstration project"; contributing to hostility between Black and white teachers; and instilling "anxieties" about the project in the minds of colleagues at an office Christmas party.¹¹³ Six days later, when five of the fired teachers tried to return to work at JHS 271, they saw swastikas painted on the building, and needed a police escort to enter the school through a crowd of angry Blacks—an inverse of the iconic imagery in southern cities like Little Rock.¹¹⁴

When the school year ended in a stalemate over the fired teachers, city officials tried to resolve the dispute before schools reopened in the fall.¹¹⁵ Francis Rivers, a Black lawyer hired by the Board of Education, reviewed the teachers' cases and pronounced their terminations groundless.¹¹⁶ The New York Civil Liberties Union, although blaming union obstructionism for the conflict in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, criticized McCoy for using his transfer power "punitively."¹¹⁷ A union intermediary told UFT president Shanker that McCoy seemed receptive to giving the fired teachers a hearing. But Shanker reportedly replied, "Fuck you. I want those teachers in the classroom now."¹¹⁸

Three Strikes

When McCoy refused to budge, Shanker called a series of citywide teacher strikes, closing 900 schools and leaving more than a million students untaught.¹¹⁹ The first strike began on what would have been the first day of school, September 9, and showed solidarity with the fired teachers, but Black reformers took it as a sign of hostility to their work. "So, this was like now a real slap

to the community,” Campbell remembered feeling. “And if you know anything about oppressed communities, if you want to unify them in action and purpose, you slap them. Because that says to them like, ‘Hey, you’re not even human.’ So that makes them step up.”¹²⁰ As the strike shut down schools citywide, the reformers in Ocean Hill-Brownsville mobilized to keep their schools open and prove they could educate their own children. At JHS-271, Assistant Principal Vann assembled students in the auditorium for an orientation. Replacement teacher Charlie Isaacs, watching from the back of the room, saw Vann backed up by about a dozen Afro-American Teachers Association members, most of whom had adopted Brother Campbell’s mode of dress and wore African dashikis. “We are engaged in a fight for our survival, the survival of the Black race, of our race, of our people,” Vann said, explaining why the school would not honor the strike. He then shouted from a James Brown song, “Now say it loud!” The students thundered “I’m Black and I’m proud!”¹²¹

This first strike ended after three days, but it ended in a way that led to further conflict. When the unwanted union teachers returned to Ocean Hill-Brownsville on Wednesday, September 11, they expected teaching assignments. Instead, McCoy summoned them to a meeting in the auditorium at Intermediate School 55. In that meeting, according to the teachers, they were yelled at, threatened, and ridiculed. Black community members stood onstage with violin cases, intimating that what was in the cases were not violins but actually guns, and somebody threw bullet cartridges at the teachers.¹²² At JHS 271 teachers found a similar scene. Flanked by about a hundred parents and activists, Sonny Carson of the Brooklyn Congress for Rational Equality (CORE), a former gang member later jailed for kidnapping, stood on the school steps and tried to prevent returning teachers from entering. By striking, Carson said, the teachers had aligned with “the same old racism that refuses to recognize the right of black and Puerto Rican people to control their own lives.”¹²³ After police put the parents into a paddy wagon and escorted the teachers inside, Carson and his associates herded the teachers into the auditorium for an “orientation” session, during which, according to the UFT,

Carson and young Black adults subjected the teachers to “taunts, vilification, verbal abuses...and threats upon their lives and the lives of their children. The lights in the windowless room were turned off and on while people screamed at them, ‘You’re going out of here in pine boxes.’”¹²⁴

Shanker responded to these threats by calling a second work-stoppage, from September 13 to 30. “I saw a reporter beaten and bloody on the ground,” Dolores Torres recalled of the strike-fracas outside JHS 271, where overwhelmed police tried to keep picketing teachers and counter-protesters apart. “I went back inside to get a washcloth and I looked through the window and saw one of our teachers, Thelma Hamilton, hit in the stomach by a policeman with a stick. This woman, in her sixties, was instrumental in starting a lot of programs in the neighborhood. Across the street a line of Black Panthers had shown up and were standing there with folded arms, and as a result of that no one else got hit that day by a policeman.”¹²⁵ As tensions grew over the next two weeks, students in Ocean-Hill Brownsville reportedly pelted picketing teachers with rocks and eggs, activists presented a bloody pig’s head to a union official, and McCoy demanded that the teachers take a “sensitivity” course before reinstatement.¹²⁶ The second strike ended when the Superintendent of Schools abolished the district’s Governing Board, suspended McCoy, and closed JHS 271.¹²⁷ But when the superintendent changed his mind, under mayoral pressure, Shanker called a third strike—and this time, he said, the union would strike until the demonstration district was dissolved.¹²⁸

The third strike, from October 14 to November 19, began with an episode of solidarity among the counter-strikers that many recalled as inspiring and beautiful, although in others it instilled a vague fear. On the first day of the third strike, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville reformers and their allies decided to show the city that they would not quietly go away. They marched across the Brooklyn Bridge into Manhattan and then rallied at City Hall. “There were literally thousands and thousands of people,” recalled Father Powis—members of Black organizations from the NAACP to the

Black Panthers to local churches, locked arm-in arm, followed overhead by helicopters going live to the evening news.¹²⁹ On the approach to the bridge through Brooklyn, Powis remembered, supporters on street corners cheered, “and people in their windows were shaking bells and all kinds of things.”¹³⁰ Looking back, Rhody McCoy thought, “Walking across the Brooklyn Bridge was...the greatest moment in my life.”¹³¹

To some white New Yorkers, however, images of Blacks marching over the bridge into Manhattan carried an undertone of menace, and the televised scenes of Blacks and whites screaming at each other in Ocean Hill-Brownsville fed their fears. “There were a number of days when there were a lot of volatile moments, when crowds were being kept away from the school by the police, and teachers had to sort of walk through a gauntlet of shouting, jeering people,” said UFT field representative Sandra Feldman, who remembered Black community members calling the striking teachers “white racist pigs” and saying, “you are going to die, and they are going to put you six feet under.”¹³² Most of the media focused on the daily circus outside JHS-271—white union teachers picketing, Black activists protesting the picketers, reporters weaving in between, police everywhere.¹³³ Students at 271 remembered thousands of helmeted police, police sharpshooters lurking on the roofs of nearby houses, police mounted on horses, police “with mean dogs,” reporters in fedora hats holding “little pads with pencils,” and photographers with their flashing light bulbs.¹³⁴ “It was a fucked up feeling,” remembered Karriema Jordan. “We’re children. Why do y’all have to have guns? Why do we need dogs? You know. I saw those things that went on down south. It’s horrifying. This is America.”¹³⁵

But as the strike dragged on for seven weeks, schools in Ocean Hill-Brownsville stayed open. Many Black students found the experience life-changing. To Cleaster Cotton, a student at JHS 271, seeing Black teachers “facing all of the reporters, all of the police, all of the dogs, the horses, the guns, everything and making sure that we got through—that was a beautiful feeling.”¹³⁶ Inside the classrooms, many Black students recalled learning more

in those weeks, despite all the chaos, than during any other time before or since—and what they learned was far from the usual fare the fired white teachers had offered. Black teachers replaced the American flag with the red, black and green flag of Black liberation, switched out the Pledge of Allegiance with the unofficial Black National Anthem, “Lift every Voice and Sing,” and supplemented the three Rs with consciousness-raising.¹³⁷ “We were broadened to W.E.B. Du Bois, his writings, Langston Hughes, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, H. Rap Brown, Mao Tse-tung and his *Red Book*,” Karriema Jordan recalled. Instructors induced the students to change their “slave names,” Jordan remembered, “so everybody adopted African names,” or names of people in the *Koran* “who did good deeds for the prophet Mohammed.”¹³⁸ Another JHS-271 student, Monifa Edwards, recalled Brother Campbell reviewing a map of the world, asking the students to point out countries like Italy, and then saying, “Can anybody show me on this map where Negroland is?” When the laughter died, Campbell said, “Where are we from? Africa. So what should we be called? African-American.”¹³⁹ To Monifa, this was a revelation: “If you had called me African when I was a Negro...Africa was Tarzan and Cleopatra, and don’t call me African because I will stomp you. You can’t fathom it, because until you realize that you’ve been written out of history, you don’t imagine the brainwashing.”¹⁴⁰ McCoy saw the ethnocentric curricula as transformational: “No more hooky, no more truant playing. Everybody was coming to school.”¹⁴¹ Father Powis regarded the increased Black-student engagement as “so spectacular that I thought that we were going to win this thing... You know, who’s so stupid as to destroy this?”¹⁴²

The third strike finally ended on Sunday, November 17. “I am gratified that the teachers strike is over and that our children can return to school at once,” Mayor Lindsay announced. The settlement returned fired teachers to work, pushed out McCoy and Campbell, and led to a state law preventing any more full-throated innovations like Ocean-Hill Brownsville.¹⁴³ Yet if the strikes had ended, the divisions had hardly healed.¹⁴⁴ The demonstration project led not to widespread adoption of the Black-studies model that transformed student engagement, but instead to a mutually

reinforcing cycle of white racism and Black antisemitism that fractured Black-Jewish allyship. After three strikes, the Black-Jewish alliance was *out*.

Racism?

Racially charged exchanges predated the crisis but intensified during and even after the strikes.¹⁴⁵ Jewish anti-Black sentiment was evident: Bronx housewives muttered on their apartment stoops about Blacks “trying to take over,” and a 46-year-old Jewish foreman in Brooklyn told a Harris pollster, “They [Blacks] claim they were sold into slavery. It was their own people who sold them. They want too much too fast. We Jews had to work a long time to get it.”¹⁴⁶ Union spokesmen openly played on fears of Black violence and did not refrain from scaremongering, implying that Black control of schools meant mob rule and racism, and calling the Ocean Hill-Brownsville militants “black Nazis.”¹⁴⁷ McCoy deemed those charges of reverse racism par for a Black activist’s course: “When you get into this kind of discussion, you’re taking on not just the school system, you’re taking on white America. So if I say, ‘I don’t want you to keep messing with my child’s mind,’ then all of the entities in white America descend on you...i.e., anti-Semitism, you name it. They descend on you.”¹⁴⁸ Paul Chandler, a white New Left organizer in Brooklyn, thought union claims “definitely misrepresented [the facts] to a point of even aggravating or even making the situation worse. Because you gotta remember. The juicier the better. It would sell more papers.”¹⁴⁹

Black activists in McCoy’s circle, however, did not alleviate those fears by engaging undeniable Jew-baiting. They quoted approvingly from *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; denounced the union as a “Jewish Mafia”; and attacked “the Jew, our great liberal friend of yesterday, whose cries of anguish still resound from the steppes of Russia to the tennis courts at Forest Hills...[who] keeps our children ignorant.”¹⁵⁰ Harris pollsters found that “blacks were consistently more prone to hold to anti-Jewish stereotypes than non-Jewish whites.”¹⁵¹

Yet Black activists' rhetoric veered well beyond the casual "Money is their God" antisemitism of the streets.¹⁵² Sonny Carson of the Brooklyn CORE regularly targeted Shanker with epithets accusing him of the ritual "mind-murder" of Black children.¹⁵³ Brother Campbell channeled Elijah Muhammad in telling students at JHS 271 that Blacks, "the Falashas in Africa, East Africa, were the original Semites," God's chosen people, who must stand up to the fake-Jew Shanker: "The only thing he understands is when we get up and start throwing bricks and Molotov cocktails."¹⁵⁴ Some of the most egregious language was issued from former Malcolm X disciple Herman Ferguson, one of McCoy's newly selected Black principals, who was later convicted for plotting to murder moderate civil-rights leaders Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young.¹⁵⁵ While awaiting trial in that case, Ferguson taught a middle-school course on "The History and Examination of Revolutionary Struggle," and during the third strike he reportedly slapped and kicked white Brownsville teachers while calling them "Jew pigs."¹⁵⁶ Jewish community leaders were especially offended when some of the same Black radicals who used antisemitic slurs set themselves up as arbiters of "true" Jewishness: One SNCC activist on the Brownsville scene declared, "We are America's Jews...And the Jews are in the position of being Germans."¹⁵⁷ Many Jews likewise resented Black activists' appropriation or diminishment of the Shoah, as when an Afro-American Teachers' Association editorial demanded: "Don't tell us any more about the 6 million slaughtered by Hitler. Tell us instead about the 12 million Blacks slaughtered in 300 years of Black genocide."¹⁵⁸

But what received the most attention, and therefore caused the most Jewish alarm, was a flier distributed by the Parents Community Council of JHS 271. This flier, which appeared in the mailboxes of the school's faculty and staff, called for the replacement of all white teachers with Black and Puerto Rican teachers:

The Only Persons Who Can Do The job ARE African-American Brothers and Sisters, And Not the So-Called Liberal Jewish Friend. We Know From His Tricky, Deceitful Maneuvers That He is Really Our Enemy and He is Responsible For The Serious Educational Retardation Of Our Black Children...The Years Of Brainwashing

And Self-Hatred That Has Been Taught To Our Black Children By Those Bloodsucking Exploiters and Murderers Is To Be Over Come. The Idea Behind This Program Is Beautiful, But When The Money Changers Heard About It, They Took Over, As Is Their Custom... Cut Out, Stay Out, Stay Off, Shut Up, Get Off Our Backs, Or Your Relatives In The Middle East Will Find Themselves Giving Benefits To Raise Money To Help You Get Out From The Terrible Weight of An Enraged Black Community.¹⁵⁹

UFT President Shanker, who wore his Jewishness, like his socialism, on his sleeve, was widely reported to have printed and distributed half a million copies of the leaflet.¹⁶⁰ Shanker made it Exhibit A in his claims that “if community control, as we see it in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, wins, there will be ‘Jew Bastard’ signs and swastikas in all the schools.”¹⁶¹

Critics charged Shanker with using the Jewish community in what amounted to a labor-management problem.¹⁶² But his dissemination of the hate literature galvanized Jews throughout the northeast, who felt that the gentile “establishment” had tolerated and even enabled Black antisemitism.¹⁶³ Shanker’s circulation of the flier would later be seen as turning public opinion and the political climate in the union’s favor. Yet the move discredited promising community control efforts, tarnished the UFT’s progressive image, poisoned the well of reasoned discourse, and made reconciliation between the two sides all but impossible.¹⁶⁴

Aftermath

The effects of the school crisis lingered throughout the decade and beyond. Those continuing consequences bore the imprint not just of the crisis but of the months that followed it, when Black antisemitism—or press reporting on it—took on an afterlife of its own. In the first two months of 1969, *The New York Times* mentioned “Black anti-Semitism” in more than seventy articles, an average of more than one per day.¹⁶⁵ The cumulative effect of those stories changed the outlook of Jews like Fred Nauman, one of the teachers fired from JHS-271. “Every time there was a confrontation of some type between black and white, I had tended to side with the black,” Nauman admitted, “but this was

the first time that I discovered...that it was possible to be black and to be wrong.”¹⁶⁶

By the end of January, when *Time Magazine* ran a cover story on unraveling Black-Jewish relations, two post-crisis incidents of Black antisemitism had received intense coverage.¹⁶⁷ The first was the catalog for a “Harlem on My Mind” exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which contained an introduction by a sixteen-year-old Black schoolgirl, who claimed: “Behind every hurdle that the Afro-American has yet to jump stands the Jew who has already cleared it, Jewish shopkeepers are the only remaining ‘survivors’ in the expanding black ghettos. The lack of competition allows the already exploited black to be further exploited by Jews.”¹⁶⁸ The second incident occurred on Julius Lester’s WBAI radio show, where Brother Campbell read an antisemitic poem dedicated to Shanker. The poem included the line, “Hey, Jew boy, with that yarmulke on your head. You pale-faced jew boy—I wish you were dead.”¹⁶⁹ Lester also gave air time to a Black NYU student, Tyrone Woods, who said, “Hitler “didn’t make enough lampshades of them.”¹⁷⁰

Those episodes influenced the report of a panel which Mayor Lindsay appointed to probe the worsening relations between Blacks and Jews. “The countless incidents, leaflets, epithets and the like in this school controversy reveal a bigotry from black extremists that is open, undisguised, nearly physical in its intensity,” the panel reported. “It is ironic that this conflict should develop so speedily and massively between Jews and Blacks—two groups who for many years have so successfully cooperated with each other in attempting to promote a higher level of human dignity...The entire community has been riven and stirred by the spreading antagonism between these two groups of old friends.”¹⁷¹ Mayor Lindsay spent so much time trying to diffuse the situation that he complained to Jewish leaders, “You Jews have made me use up all my Negro credit cards.”¹⁷²

The impact of the crisis on New York’s Jewish identity was profound and lasting. One result was the rise of Jewish identity politics, stimulated in part by the example of Black Power: “Jews

Urged to Follow Example of Black Assertiveness,” said one *New York Times* headline.¹⁷³ A Jewish concern with law and order, stemming from saturation coverage of the school crisis, led to the creation of the Brooklyn-based Jewish Defense League (JDL), a kind of kosher Black Panthers, who disrupted Lindsay’s speeches by chanting slogans like “No Nazis at NYU, Jewish rights are precious too.”¹⁷⁴

The political impact was soon felt in the splintering of Rooseveltian big-tent liberalism into factions of convenience, bonded less by shared hopes than by shared fears. A strengthened Jewish-Catholic alliance emerged from worries that Blacks really did want to tear down white society, as Carmichael and others had vowed to do.¹⁷⁵ A reconfiguration of city electoral politics ensued, with outer-borough Jews and Catholics aligning to shift the city rightward with eroding support for welfare programs while increasing support for the police, a trend which would crest in the 1990s with Broken Windows policing under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.¹⁷⁶ The strange-bedfellows developments included Shanker partnering with conservatives in the New York state legislature in Albany, and the evolution (or cooption) of the Black community control vision into a school choice agenda championed by conservative whites.¹⁷⁷

Those conservatives included a cadre of Jewish intellectuals, who registered the ideological impact of the crisis in the nascent movement soon called neoconservatism.¹⁷⁸ They called for a return to the Jewish-humanist ideals of a “common culture,” and filled their sails with the cultural wind of the Nixonian moment.¹⁷⁹ In a series of *Commentary* magazine articles, the neocons turned the school crisis into a parable of New Left madness which, during the next decade, influenced the mental migrations of intellectuals like Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer from the Old Left to a New Right.¹⁸⁰

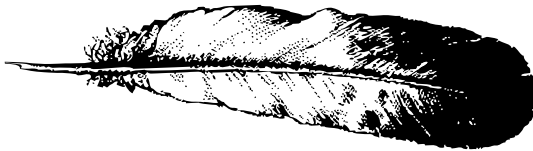
Coda

Yet if all these changes seemed dramatic enough, they were less reversals than revelations. The school crisis did not so much produce Black-Jewish tensions as unmask them.¹⁸¹ Jewish-Black divisions were partly, perhaps even mostly, the result of larger

white-Black divisions which, as Glazer had seen in 1964, the amity of the midcentury multiracial civil rights movement could no longer conceal.¹⁸²

By the end of the 1960s, identity politics were triumphant, on the white right as much as on the Black left. If Jews continued to vote Democratic, they increasingly sided with other whites on issues such as affirmative action.¹⁸³ This was a sad coda for a true-believing Black radical like Julius Lester, who, after platforming Black antisemitism during the school crisis, converted to Judaism, became a professor of Judaic Studies, and spent the rest of his life working to improve the Black-Jewish relations he had once played a role in disrupting.¹⁸⁴

“More and more, ethnic identity is becoming a substitute for personal identity,” Lester ruefully reflected in 1994. That trend, he thought, discouraged both Jews and Blacks from learning what he considered the central lesson of the school crisis and its impact on interracial allyship. “Agreement is not a prerequisite for alliance. Understanding and respect are.”¹⁸⁵



Endnotes

¹ Louis Harris, and Bert E. Swanson, *Black-Jewish Relations in New York City* (New York: Praeger, 1970), xix.

² Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 236; Zoe Burkholder, *An African American Dilemma: A History of School Integration and Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Oxford, 2021), 140.

³ Maurice Goldbloom, "The New York School Crisis," *Commentary*, January 1969; Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 137; Fred Ferretti, "New York's Black Anti-Semitism Scare," *Columbia Journalism Review* 8:3 (Fall 1969), 18-29. In Adams and Bracey, *Strangers and Neighbors*, 646.

⁴ Pritchett, *Brownsville*, 237; Buhle, TK, 216; Stein, "Strategies for Failure," 171-2; Podair, *Strike*, 69.

⁵ Harris, *Black-Jewish Relations*, xix.

⁶ Maurice Berube and Marilyn Gittell, eds. *Confrontation at Ocean Hill-Brownsville* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1969), 164.

⁷ John Kifner, "Echoes of a New York Waterloo," *The New York Times*, December 22, 1996.

⁸ Henry Raymont, "Jews Debating Black Anti-Semitism," *New York Times*, January 26, 1969, 1, 59.

⁹ Melissa F. Weiner, *Power, Protest, and the Public Schools: Jewish and African American Struggles in New York City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 174.

¹⁰ Harris, *Black-Jewish Relations*, 131; Pritchett, *Brownsville*, 236; Andrew Hacker, "Jewish Racism, Black Anti-Semitism," *Reconstruction* 1:3 (1991), 14-17. In Berman, *Blacks and Jews*, 154-163; Burkholder, *Dilemma*, 146; Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of The New York City Public Schools*. Rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 251-380. 362-378; Daniel Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 713.

¹¹ Pritchett, *Brownsville*, 222.

¹² Kaufman, *Alliance*, 1644; Harris, *Relations*, xix; Glazer and Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 167; Diner, *Almost Promised*, 114; Carson, "Black-Jewish Universalism," 177-196.

¹³ Julius Lester, "The Lives People Live"; Berman, *Blacks and Jews*, 165; Nat Hentoff, "Blacks and Jews: An Interview

with Julius Lester,” *Evergreen Review* 13:65 (1969); Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy* (Columbia, 2007), 125; Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 236.

¹⁴ Lester, “Lives,” 167.

¹⁵ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 164; Isaacs, *Inside*, 210; Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 105-203.

¹⁶ Diner, *Almost Promised*, 238.

¹⁷ Nathan Glazer, “Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier,” *Commentary*, August 1968.

¹⁸ Alan M. Fisher, “Jews and African Americans,” *Great Events from History: African American History*, ed. Kibibi Mack-Shelton (Salem, 2017); Cheryl Greenberg, “Negotiating Coalition: Black and Jewish Civil Rights Agencies in the Twentieth Century,” Salzman and West, eds., *Struggles*, 168; Diner, *Almost Promised*, 238.

¹⁹ Isaacs, *Inside*, 211.

²⁰ Nathan Glazer, “Negroes and Jews: The New Challenge to Pluralism,” *Commentary*, December 1964.

²¹ Podair, *Strike*, 155.

²² Karen Brodtkin Sacks, “How Did Jews Become White Folks?” Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, eds. *Race* (Rutgers, 1994), 78-102; Adams and Bracey, *Strangers*, 511-515.

²³ It was said that of the five people that a Black met, the landlord, the storeowner, the social worker, the teacher, the cop—one, the cop, is Irish. The other four are Jews. Kaufman, *Alliance*, 137.

²⁴ Griffith and Freedman, *Colors* 1:2.

²⁵ Jay Eskin, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

²⁶ Harris, *Relations*, 93.

²⁷ Harris, *Relations*, 56. By the later 1960s the most affluent Jews lived in Manhattan, and the least affluent in the Bronx, where their neighborhoods were said to be “inundated by immigrations of Puerto Ricans and blacks [who] make up a majority of the city’s burgeoning welfare rolls” (Harris, *Relations*, xviii).

²⁸ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 138.

²⁹ Milton Himmelfarb, “Negroes, Jews, and Muzhiks,” *Commentary*, October 1966. From April 1965 to September 1966, the share of northern whites who said the government was pushing civil rights “too fast” almost doubled, to over 50 percent: Kahlenberg, *Liberal*, 99.

³⁰ Harris, *Relations*, 43.

³¹ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 108, 110.

³² For anti-white statements, see Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 51; anti-Jewish, *Message*, 237, 24, 71, 137; anti-Christian, *Message*, 74, 94, and 160, quoting *Koran* 5:51; radical separatism, *Message*, 161; against intermarriage, *Message*, 171; Black-centric curriculum, *Message*, 48, 171; all-Black teachers: *Message*, 39, 40, 44, 48, 130, 162, 171.

³³ *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 183, 422.

³⁴ Newton, *To Die for the People*, 252.

³⁵ Quoted in “A ‘Black Power’ Speech That Has Congress Aroused,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Aug. 22, 1966, 6.

³⁶ John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Free Press, 2003), 428. A week after the signing of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965, as King walked the streets of Watts trying to calm the rioters, he was shaken when group of Black teenagers turned on him and his entourage, reportedly shouting. “What are you middle-class n—s doing coming here? Do you have a job? Do you have a home? We don’t!” Kaufman, *Alliance*, 127.

³⁷ Malcolm wrote, “All of the bigotry and hatred focused upon the black man keeps off the Jew a lot of heat that would be on him otherwise. For an example of what I am talking about—in every black ghetto, Jews own the major businesses. Every night the owners of those businesses go home with that black community’s money, which helps the ghetto to stay poor” (*Autobiography*, 328). At the 1968 national convention of the Arab students in America, Carmichael said that he had once been “for the Jews” but had reformed; his longtime associate in the SNCC, Clayborne Carson, recalled that as Carmichael competed for Malcolm X’s constituency, ties to Jews were a liability; that Carmichael’s increasingly anti-Jewish sentiment was rooted in a long personal history of interactions with Jewish leftists; and that Carmichael condemned “the Jews” for using Hitler’s atrocities to justify the creation of the state of Israel. Carson, “Black-Jewish Universalism,” 186, 187, 190.

³⁸ Novick, *Holocaust*, 148-152; Kaufman, *Alliance*, 138; Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 348-360 (calling the Six-Day War the “most important event” in the history of American Zionism, 348). During the Six-Day War SNCC members prepared an article that seemed designed to provoke Jewish former supporters: The caption on one of the photographs, which portrayed

Zionists shooting Arab victims who were lined up against a wall, noted "This is the Gaza Strip, Palestine, not Dachau, Germany" (Carson, *In Struggle*, 267-68). Rabbi Harold Saperstein withdrew support from SNCC, explaining that SNCC leaders' willingness "to become a mouthpiece for malicious Arab propaganda undermines my confidence in their judgment" (Carson, "Blacks and Jews: The Case of SNCC," Salzman, *Bridges and Boundaries*, 44; Carson, "Black-Jewish Universalism," 188). On the New Politics Conference, see esp. Michel Feher, "The Schisms of '67: On Certain Restructurings of the American Left, from the Civil Rights Movement to the Multiculturalist Constellation," in Paul Berman ed., *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments* (Delacorte, 1994), 263-264; Paul Buhle and Robin D.G. Kelley, "Allies of a Different Sort," Salzman and West, eds., *Struggles*, 214.

³⁹ Carson, "Black-Jewish Universalism," 182. From 1966 to 1968, Jewish groups typically called reports of Black antisemitism exaggerated (Karp and Shapiro 662). A 1967 ADL report portrayed Black men as the least anti-Semitic Christian group; the AJC stated that reports of Black Jew-hatred were "overblown"; the Jewish umbrella group NCRC emphasized that one must not mistake "legitimate protest" by Black men for anti-semitism (Ferretti 647, Karp and Shapiro, "Exploding the Myth," 663); Brownsville Jewish teacher Charles Isaacs read in the Jewish press about "black racism," but reportedly saw none (Ferretti, "Scare," 649). See also Waldo E. Martin, "Nation Time! Black Nationalism, the Third World, and Jews," in Salzman and West, eds., *Struggles*, 341-55, 347.

⁴⁰ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 137; *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 217; Buhle, "Allies," 216.

⁴¹ Jewish intellectuals who grew up in the neighborhood included Alfred Kazin and Norman Podhoretz: Podair, *Strike* 17; David McClintick and Art Sears, "Decentralized District in New York Ghetto Claims Gains in Schools," *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 1969, 28.

⁴² Griffith and Freedman, *Colors* 1:2.

⁴³ Kahlenberg, *Liberal*, 106.

⁴⁴ McCoy, "Dragon," 53; Stern, "Scab Teachers," 178; Pritchett 225. For other contemporaneous descriptions of the neighborhood, see Isaacs, *Inside*, 4; Kahlenberg, *Liberal*, 106;

Kaufman, *Alliance*, 129-40; Rhody McCoy, "Sounding Board." *New York Times*, January 9, 1969; Podair, *Strike*, 17.

⁴⁵ John Kifner, "Militant Priest of Ocean Hill Brownsville Decries Bureaucracy," *New York Times*, December 1, 1968.

⁴⁶ Fantini, et al., *Community Control*, 146; McCoy, "Sounding Board."

⁴⁷ John Powis, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2; Dolores Torres, oral history interview, 487.

⁴⁸ Cleaster Cotton, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁴⁹ Les Campbell, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁵⁰ Sufia de Silva, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁵¹ Rhody McCoy, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁵² Griffith and Freedman, *Colors* 1:2.

⁵³ Dolores Torres, oral history interview, *Voices*, 487.

⁵⁴ John Powis, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁵⁵ Dolores Torres, oral history interview, *Voices*, 487.

⁵⁶ Pritchett, *Brownsville*, 225; McCoy, "Dragon," 53.

⁵⁷ Kahlenberg, *Liberal*, 124.

⁵⁸ Hampton and Fayer, *Voices*, 485.

⁵⁹ Griffith and Freedman, *Colors* 1:2.

⁶⁰ Fantini, et al., *Community Control*, 146; C. Herbert Oliver, oral history interview, *Voices*, 488.

⁶¹ New York City Board of Education, Advisory and Evaluation Committee on Decentralization, "Final Report [Niemeyer Report]," July 30, 1968. On the Ford Foundation's role, see also Eugenia Kemble, "Ocean-Hill Brownsville," *United Teacher*, December 20, 1967; Kaufman, *Alliance*, 164; McCoy, "Year of the Dragon," 55; Pritchett, *Brownsville*, 229. The foundation's recommendations largely accorded with those in Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 47.

⁶² Rhody McCoy, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁶³ *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 208, 308; Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 47, 53, 54; Kaufman, *Alliance*, 129.

⁶⁴ Rhody McCoy, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁶⁵ Rhody McCoy, oral history interview, *Voices of Freedom*, 495.

⁶⁶ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 129; Podair, *Strike*, 65.

⁶⁷ Sleeper, *Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York* (Norton, 1990), 100; Kahlenberg, *Liberal*, 170.

⁶⁸ "As history has so frequently recorded, the end of oppression has often become a reality only after people have resorted to violent means...The plan this committee drafted is acknowledged to be the last demonstration of the community's

faith in the school system's purposes and abilities." McCoy, "Year of the Dragon," 53.

⁶⁹ Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board, "Draft Guidelines for a Demonstration Project," March 26, 1968; Eugenia Kemble, "Ocean-Hill Brownsville," *United Teacher*, December 20, 1967.

⁷⁰ New York Civil Liberties Union, "The Burden of Blame," 1968.

⁷¹ New York City Board of Education, Advisory and Evaluation Committee on Decentralization, "Final Report [Niemeyer Report]," July 30, 1968.

⁷² Sandra Feldman, oral history interview, *Voices*, 489.

⁷³ Steve Brier, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

⁷⁴ Eugenia Kemble, "Ocean-Hill Brownsville," *United Teacher*, December 20, 1967.

⁷⁵ Fred Nauman, oral history interview, *Voices*, 490.

⁷⁶ Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board, "Draft Guidelines for a Demonstration Project," March 26, 1968.

⁷⁷ New York Civil Liberties Union, "The Burden of Blame," 1968.

⁷⁸ Eugenia Kemble, "Ocean-Hill Brownsville," *United Teacher*, December 20, 1967.

⁷⁹ Kahlenberg, *Liberal*, 125.

⁸⁰ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 138, 147; Isaacs, *Inside*, 148.

⁸¹ Podair, *Strike*, 113; "The Black and the Jew."

⁸² United Federation of Teachers, Executive Board, "Policy Statement on Decentralization," November 28, 1967.

⁸³ Podair, *Strike*, 57.

⁸⁴ "The Bundy model is not decentralization; it is Balkanization." Office of the Mayor of New York, "Reconnection for Learning: Report of the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Decentralization of the New York City Schools" [Bundy Report], November 1967.

⁸⁵ Albert Shanker, oral history interview, *Voices*, 495.

⁸⁶ Schlomo Katz, "Introduction to Negro and Jew: An Encounter in America" (Simon and Schuster, 1967), Adams and Bracey, *Strangers and Neighbors*, 643; John Goldman, "N.Y. Negroes Defy Carmichael," *Boston Globe*, September 23, 1966, 77; Milton Himmelfarb, "Is American Jewry in Crisis?" *Commentary*, March 1969.

⁸⁷ Podair, *Strike*, 5ff, 57ff.

⁸⁸ Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (MIT Press, 1963); Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (U.S. Department of Labor), 1965.

⁸⁹ Podair, *Strike*, 56; Goldbloom, "The New York School Crisis"; James Coleman, "Equal Schools or Equal Students?" *The Public Interest* 4 (Summer 1966), 73-74; Oscar Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," *Scientific American* 215 (October 1966), 21, 25; Jeremy Lerner, "The New York School Crisis" in Irving Howe, ed., *The Urban School Crisis: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Irving Howe (United Federation of Teachers, 1966), 11, 12.

⁹⁰ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 130.

⁹¹ Kemble, "Ocean-Hill Brownsville," *United Teacher*, December 20, 1967.

⁹² New York Civil Liberties Union, "Burden of Blame"; Robert Rosenthal and Lenore F. Jacobsen, "Teacher Expectations for the Disadvantaged," *Scientific American*, April 1968.

⁹³ Kenneth Clark, "Clash of Cultures in the Classroom," *Integrated Education* 1 (August 1963), 11, 13; Jewel Bellush and Stephen M. David, eds. *Race and Politics in New York City: Five Studies in Policy-Making* (Praeger, 1971), 26-27; Podair, *Strike*, 59; Preston Wilcox, "The Controversy Over I.S. 201," *Urban Review* 1 (July 1966), 13-15, and "Africanization: The New Input to Black Education," *Freedomways* 8, Fall 1968, 396.

⁹⁴ Edward Weaver, "The New Literature on Education of the Black Child," *Freedomways* 8 (Fall 1968), 375, 379; Milton Galamison, "Educational Values and Community Power," *Freedomways* 8, Fall 1968, 311. One Black newspaper editorialized: "We say the philosophical outlook of the West is destructive of the human spirit. We say we don't want to go whitey's way" (Podair, *Strike*, 65, citing *The Liberator*, September 1968, 2).

⁹⁵ Podair, *Strike*, 60.

⁹⁶ Carson, "Black-Jewish Universalism," 186; Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 40, 65, 319, 320, 321, 324. In 1967 the Black intellectual Harold Cruse called the idea of "humanism" in America a myth: The U. S. was a stronghold of "European cultural and spiritual values," and white middle-class culture, claiming to reward "meritorious" individuals on a color-blind basis, was a sham; instead, Cruse urged amending the Constitution to grant rights to ethnic groups instead of to

individuals, “mirroring the basic group reality of America.” *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York Review of Books, 2005 [1967]), 283, 317.

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⁹⁸ Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board, “Draft Guidelines for a Demonstration Project,” March 26, 1968; John F. Hatchett, “The Phenomenon of the Anti-Black Jews and the Black Anglo-Saxon,” *African-American Teachers Forum* (November-December, 1967), 1-4; Isaacs, *Inside*, 198; McClintick and Sears, “Decentralized District,” 28; Rhody McCoy, “Sounding Board.”

⁹⁹ Sia Berhan, oral history interview, *Voices*, 492; Monifa Edwards, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

¹⁰⁰ Les Campbell, oral history interview, *Voices*, 491.

¹⁰¹ Les Campbell, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

¹⁰² C. Herbert Oliver, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:3.

¹⁰³ Kemble, “Ocean-Hill Brownsville,” *United Teacher*, December 20, 1967.

¹⁰⁴ James T. Patterson, “The Most Turbulent Year: 1968,” *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (Oxford, 1996), 678-706; William H. Chafe, “1968,” *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 8th ed. (Oxford, 2015), 328-364.

¹⁰⁵ Himmelfarb, “Is American Jewry in Crisis?,” 132.

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¹⁰⁷ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 149.

¹⁰⁸ Les Campbell, podcast interview, *Colors* 1:2.

¹⁰⁹ Karriema Jordan, oral history interview, *Voices*, 485.

¹¹⁰ Kaufman, *Alliance*, 150.

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