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REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

Research Resources for the Study of African-American and Jewish Relations*

Betty Kaplan Gubert

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Abstract: Several libraries in New York City have exceptionally rich resources for the study of relations between African Americans and Jewish Americans. The holdings of and access to these collections are discussed; some sources in other parts of the U.S. are mentioned as well. The most important collection is in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Besides books, there is a vast Clipping File, the unique Kaiser Index, manuscript collections, and some audio and visual materials. The Jewish Division of The New York Public Library has unparalleled holdings of Jewish newspapers from around the world, from which relevant articles can be derived.

The libraries of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the YIVO Institute are also both fine sources. Their book holdings are up-to-date, and YIVO's clipping file is also, including such items as publicity releases from Mayors Koch and Dinkins. YIVO's archives have such important historical holdings as the American Jewish Committee Records (1930s to the 1970s), and some NAACP materials from the thirties and forties.

Children's books on this topic and ways of acquiring information are noted. A list of the major libraries, with addresses, telephone numbers, and hours is in an appendix.

Pessimism and Optimism

The subject of relations and encounters between African Americans and Jewish

Americans has been examined and analyzed in numerous books, articles, dissertations, and conferences. Some titles are straightforward. Others reflect the complexity of these relations over the years: Jonathan Kaufman's *Broken Alliance* (1988), Robert Weisbord's *Bittersweet Encounter* (1970), William M. Phillips's *An Unillustrious Alliance* (1991), and Jack Salzman's *Bridges and Boundaries* (1992). These titles have a largely pessimistic ring.

On the other hand, there are numerous local activities between the two groups that generate pamphlets, manuals, and revised versions of the *Haggadah*, which reflect attempts to repair, sweeten, and make illustrious those encounters between African Americans and Jewish Americans. In 1991, the Kovler Institute for Black-Jewish Relations (Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, D.C.) published *Common Road to Justice: A Programming Manual for Blacks and Jews*, edited by Lynne Landsberg. Black-Jewish seders are held, and in 1993 a Jewish-Haitian seder was held in Massachusetts. Whether optimistic or pessimistic, materials about these two American minorities abound for interested students or scholars, at whatever level of research they wish to undertake.

The Schomburg Center at NYPL

A good start may be made with Lenwood Davis's *Black-Jewish Relations in the United States, 1752-1984: A Selected Bibliography*. Published in 1984 by Greenwood Press, it is the latest, and at 130 pages, the longest bibliography on this topic to date. More recent books and articles can be accessed through *America: History and Life, Reader's Guide*, and *Index to Jewish Periodicals*. For books, a good source is the *Bibliographic Guide to Black Studies*, published by G. K. Hall (1975-). One of Hall's annual subject bibliographies, it extracts all the titles cataloged by the Research Libraries of The

New York Public Library (NYPL). These titles are of course in the online catalogs of NYPL, but if one wants to see what has been published in a particular year, or the most recent work, this provides a more efficient means of access. The *Guide* lists books held by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a division of NYPL. Arthur A. Schomburg, whose personal collection formed the core of the Center—and for whom it is named—was a Puerto Rican of African and German descent. There is no Jewish connection here. The Center is, however, the foremost institution in which to find material on relations between African Americans and Jews. Now nearly 70 years old, it contains a large number of books on the subject.

Many of these books may be found at other libraries, but the Schomburg Center has two unique resources which are significant: the clipping files, begun in 1925, and the *Kaiser Index to Black Resources, 1948-1986* (Carlson Publishing, 1992). Both of these gems began as in-house finding aids because there was so little reference or biographical material available then. For that reason, the clipping files were never weeded, as library manuals tell us they should be. The file grew and grew until it is now in three parts.

The first part covers 1925 to 1974 and is on microfiche. For "Jews and Negroes," the heading then used, there are seven fiche cards, each holding 98 book-sized pages. There is an eighth card headed "Jews and Negroes—Bibliography." The second part, a supplement to the file covering the years 1975 to 1988, has also been converted to microfiche. It consists of twelve cards, pointing to the great increase in available information in recent decades. The dates of the file are acquisition dates, not dates of publication. This file includes articles dated 1936, 1964, and 1968, for example. In this section, there was an interesting find: an article entitled "Among the Children of the East Side Jews," written in 1905 by a young Black woman teacher, Jessie Fortune.

*Paper presented at the 28th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries, New York, June 21, 1993, at a session entitled "Research Resources in Selected Fields."

Her father, T. Thomas Fortune, was the publisher of *New York Age*, a Black newspaper. He published her article in his newspaper, and *Jewish Currents* reprinted it in February 1975. The third part, still in hard copy, continues from 1989 to the present. It consists of four large envelopes which contain, besides clippings and flyers, a Black-Jewish *Haggadah* and an Anti-Defamation League Research Report, "The Anti-Semitism of Black Demagogues and Extremists," both dated 1992.

The *Kaiser Index to Black Resources, 1948-1986* is an index to Black periodical literature. But it also contains citations to books and sometimes even to articles in *The New York Times*. This is in contrast to the clipping file, which primarily contains articles from the White press. The *Kaiser Index* dates from 1948, but includes some earlier articles. It was compiled by Ernest Kaiser, who worked at the Schomburg Center for 40 years and retired in 1986. Some of the periodicals covered are *New York Amsterdam News*, *Freedomways*, *Negro History Bulletin*, *Muhammad Speaks*, *New South*, and the *Pittsburgh Courier*. The Library of Congress heading "Afro-Americans—Relations with Jews" is used in the index, and under it there are about 135 citations. Under the heading "Jews—United States" there are another 50 citations. The machine-readable version of the *Kaiser Index* is available only at the Center, so if a personal or organizational name cannot be found in the book index, a request may be made for a computer search.

The Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division at the Schomburg Center contains a number of archival record groups documenting the participation of Jewish individuals in phases of the civil rights movement. Non-institutional, these records are contemporaneous and frank.

The record groups include the Ruth Schein Papers—documents written or printed at the time of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project; the Iris Greenburg Papers, which tell of her experiences in Arkansas in 1963; the Robert and Anita Stein Papers, which document the efforts of the Ethical Culture Society to further interracial harmony in the South of the 1960s; and the Dr. Ross Thalheimer Papers, which include telegrams from Martin Luther King, Jr., and a letter from Kenneth Clark. Thalheimer belonged to both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League. The papers of Ethel Payne, a Black journalist, include four folders of clippings and materials from a conference

on Black-Jewish relations. The Ralph Bunche Papers contain materials on the Jewish Labor Committee and liberal and left-wing groups, as well as material on his Mideast peace efforts, for which Bunche won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.

Other Repositories

The archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research hold the records of the American Jewish Committee from 1930 to the 1970s. This enormous collection is extremely important for research on this period. Among the subjects included are antisemitism, bigotry, civil liberties, integration (boxes 47–61), litigation, meetings with Negro leaders, minstrel shows (letters from AJC dated 1950 to 1960 explain to congregations why these entertainments are offensive), public accommodations, and White House Conferences. The subject of race relations is further broken down: box 257 contains speeches, surveys of attitudes of Negroes toward Jews, and studies from the forties to the sixties; box 258 covers tensions between the two groups from 1938 to 1962; and box 259 has information on the sit-ins of 1960–1962. There is also information on the NAACP in the 1930s and 1940s.

YIVO's library is up-to-date on books about relations between Jewish Americans and African Americans. The clipping file is current and thick, and includes more than just clippings. It contains the press releases that both Mayors Koch and Dinkins sent about their stands on issues affecting Blacks and Jews, in 1988 and 1992, respectively. The file also contains an article from the *Jewish Standard*, written by Julius Lester in 1992, about antisemitism among African Americans.

The Jewish Division of the New York Public Library has an unparalleled collection of newspapers from national and international sources. Most of them are on microfilm. It is unfortunate that they are not indexed. For documentation of the role Jews played in the civil rights movement, there is the Irving M. Engel Oral History Collection on Civil Rights. Particular attention is paid to Black-Jewish relations in the movement. People such as Roger Baldwin, Jack Greenberg, Dorothy I. Height, Bayard Rustin, and Roy Wilkins are represented. This collection is part of the larger William E. Wiener Oral History Library. The Jewish Division has both transcripts and audiocassettes of the interviews.

The libraries of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) and Yeshiva

University both have strong book collections on the subject, along with sets of the *Index to Jewish Periodicals*. JTS has a clipping file, but it has not been kept current. Nevertheless, the file contains articles of value to the researcher. For example, one can find in it articles from the *Baltimore Jewish Times* (November 8, 1985) about Louis Farrakhan in Los Angeles. There is also an article on Crown Heights' racial tensions (*New York Times*, April 10, 1987), and the transcript of a television program on antisemitism and the Negro, dating from the 1960s. Two bibliographies dated 1966 and 1968 are among other relevant items in the file.

Children's Literature

Children's books very often provide glimpses of interactions between African Americans and Jewish Americans. Recent titles that do so in original ways are *Elijah's Angel: A Story for Chanukah and Christmas*, by Michael J. Rosen (1992) and illustrated by Aminah B. L. Robinson; *Chicken Sunday and Mrs. Katz and Tush*, both written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco (1992); and *All the Colors of the Race*, by Arnold Adoff (1982) and illustrated by John Steptoe. These books are autobiographical. The first three show mainly unrelated children and adults from both groups interacting with each other. Adoff's poetry presents the views of a child of an interracial marriage. More playful, and for a younger group, is *You Be Me, I'll Be You*. The child is brown-skinned, the father White. While there is no evidence that one of the parents is Jewish, the author is Pili Mandelbaum (1990). The book was translated from French.

Conclusion

In all the libraries mentioned there is a wealth of information, as well as complexity of access. The catalogs, finding aids, and indexes are in multiple parts. The situation of multi-part catalogs and indexes, each with its own finding aids and idiosyncrasies, is of course due to rapidly expanding technologies and efforts to expand a library's holdings beyond its own walls, as well as to commercial enterprises. There's fiche, film, online, paper, and sometimes the information is in more than one form.

Librarians are essential as guides to the complicated access that obtains at great, old libraries. Printed guides to using the library would be useful, although there are differences of opinion about how many patrons read them. Serious scholars find

them most helpful, and they substitute to some extent for the librarian at extremely busy times. Schomburg, a public library, often has 50–100 patrons in the two reading rooms, especially during the academic year.

Acknowledgments

The librarians of all the institutions I visited were friendly and eager to make their treasures available. In fact, the librarians were essential to finding the treasures. I would like to thank Dina Abramowicz (YIVO), Zalman Alpert (YU), Leonard Gold (NYPL), Fruma Mohrer (YIVO), Yael Penkower (JTS), Berlina Robinson (Schomburg), Marek Web (YIVO), and Mary Yearwood (Schomburg).

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- Mandelbaum, Pili. *You Be Me, I'll Be You*. Brooklyn, NY: Kane/Miller, 1990. Translated from French. Original title: *Noire comme le café, blanc comme la lune*.
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- Polacco, Patricia. *Chicken Sunday*. New York: Philomel Books, 1992.
- _____. *Mrs. Katz and Tush*. New York: Bantam Books, 1992.
- Rosen, Michael J. *Elijah's Angel: A Story for Chanukah and Christmas*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.
- Salzman, Jack. *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews*. New York: George Braziller in association with the Jewish Museum, 1992.
- Weisbord, Robert. *Bittersweet Encounter: The Afro-American and the American Jew*. Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970.

Appendix: Institutional Resources for the Study of African-American and Jewish Relations

I. Libraries

The hours given for the libraries are winter hours; they change during the summer. It is best to call ahead.

Jewish Division, New York Public Library
Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street
New York, NY 10018
(212) 930-0601
Hours: Tuesday 10–7:15
Wednesday 11–5:45
Thursday–Saturday 10–5:45

Jewish Theological Seminary
of America, Library
3080 Broadway at 122nd Street
New York, NY 10027
(212) 678-8080
Hours: Monday–Thursday 8 am–10 pm
Friday 8–4
Sunday 9:30 am–10 pm

Schomburg Center for Research
in Black Culture
New York Public Library
515 Malcolm X Blvd.
(Lenox Ave. at 135th Street)
New York, NY 10037
(212) 491-2218 (Reference)
Hours: Monday–Wednesday 12–8
Friday–Saturday 10–6
(212) 491-2224 (Archives)
Same opening hours; closes at 5

Yeshiva University
Mendel Gottesman Library
500 West 185th Street
New York, NY 10033
(212) 960-5382
Hours: Monday–Thursday 9–1am
Friday 9–12:30 pm
Sunday 12 noon–1 am

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
555 West 57th Street
Suite 1100
New York, NY 10019
(212) 246-6080
Hours: Monday–Thursday 9:30–5:30
[This is an interim address. YIVO is scheduled to move. —Ed.]

II. Policy Institutes

The following organizations issue publications that may be of interest as resources for the study of relations between African Americans and Jewish Americans.

Marjorie Kovler Institute
for Black-Jewish Relations
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.
(202) 387-2800

Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies
University of Judaism
15600 Mulholland Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90077

III. Seders

The following groups sponsor African-American/Jewish seders.

The Black-Jewish seder was first organized in 1980.

Anti-Defamation League
One Lincoln Plaza, Suite 301
Boston, MA 02111
Att'n.: BJ Events

The following groups sponsored the Jewish-Haitian seder, held in 1993.

Boston Jewish Sanctuary Network
P.O. Box 441361
Somerville, MA 02144
(617) 739-1957

New Jewish Agenda
P.O. Box 390787
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 623-1921

Haiti Communications Project
11 Inman Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 868-2900

Betty Kaplan Gubert was for 21 years the Head of the General Research and Reference Division of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library. Retired in 1991, she serves as art editor for MultiCultural Review. She has compiled Invisible Wings: An Annotated Bibliography on Blacks in Aviation 1916–1993 (Greenwood, 1994).

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