

READERS' FORUM

ANTI-SEMITISM AND BLACK POWER

WE ARE in the hideous center of a mortal storm, which many of us saw coming. Many of us will perish and certainly no one of my generation can hope, honorably, to survive. And, whether or not one agrees with me, I think it is useful to assume that America will not survive this storm, either. Nor should she; she is responsible for this holocaust in which the living writhe; it is American power which makes death an enviable state for so many millions of people. We are a criminal nation, built on a lie, and, as the world cannot use us, it will presently find some way of disposing of us. I take this for granted, and the future of this nation, even though it may also be my own, cannot concern me any longer. I am concerned with the living, I am concerned with a new morality, and a new creation. I hope I do not sound literary; in any case, I mean what I say. I really believe that it is possible for human beings to make the world a place in which we all can live.

I think I understand, in spite of my limits—for I know more about my limits than anyone else can know, and no tribunal frightens me; I am my own tribunal—a great deal about the crisis which we, black, in America, are now

enduring. The crisis has been produced by the history of Europe and the brutality of the Christian church; and I think it is very important to bear in mind that, whereas we, black, are enduring a crisis, the descendants of Europe and the defenders of the faith are witnessing their doom. Indeed, they are graceless—but they are human. This is hard, hard, hard to remember: I know how hard it is. But if one does not remember it, the battle is for nothing.

I think I know how white America operates to destroy the black integrity—and not by accident, but deliberately. You will observe, I hope, that, in doing this, it has also destroyed its own integrity. I hope you will understand me and I hope you will believe me when I say that I would rather die than see the black American become as hideously empty as the majority of white men have become. I would like us to do something unprecedented: to create ourselves without finding it necessary to create an enemy. But, since we are surrounded by enemies, I think I should spell that out.

A black high school drop-out in Watts, for example, has every reason to hate the police, the law-

yers, the judges, the priests, the teachers, the bosses, the landlords, the Mayor, the Governor, and Ronald Reagan. I do not shrink from asserting that the human value of these people can only exist in the sight of God, and, happily, I'm not God (who is also, in any case, and not a moment too soon, about to go out of business). But he has no right to hate the Governor's child, and no one has a right to teach him to hate. I think that we, human beings, must try to change each other. I am perfectly aware that nothing will ever change Governor Wallace or Senator Eastland. But it is the system which created these people and gave them their power which must be isolated, anatomized, attacked, and destroyed. And I think we must be very clear-headed about this, for no people have ever been in a revolutionary situation so bizarre. It is a revolution which has all the aspects of a civil war; but, at the same time, it is happening all over the globe; and America is fighting it all over the globe—using, by no means incidentally, vast numbers of its surplus and despised population. Hopefully, for example, if enough Vietnamese and black Americans are blown into eternity, the world will be made safe—for business. There is a very good reason, after all, why the government which could so severely compromise the

Cuban economy can do nothing whatever to intimidate the South African economy. A revolution in South Africa would have a terrible effect on Wall Street and on the Bank of The Holy Ghost—which latter institution stands, as you know, in Rome: a monument to what is probably the most extensive, successful, murderous, and blasphemous enterprise in the history of mankind. If the Bank of The Holy Ghost should fail, the heathen could no longer be saved. And you remember, I hope, how desperately we heathens longed for salvation.

Well, then: the nature of the enemy is history; the nature of the enemy is power; and what every black man, boy, woman, girl, is struggling to achieve is some sense of himself or herself which this history and this power have done everything conceivable to destroy. But let us try to be clear. Black Power is not a mystical or a poetic concept, for example, it is simply a political necessity. It has nothing to do with bad guys or good guys, and it really has nothing to do with color. Black Arts has nothing to do with color, either. It is an attempt to create a black self image which the white republic could never allow. It is an attempt to tell the truth about black people to black people because the American republic has told us nothing but lies.

But the republic has told *itself*

nothing but lies. If one accepts my basic assumption, which is that all men are brothers—simply because all men share the same condition, however different the details of their lives may be—then it is perfectly possible, it seems to me, that, in re-creating ourselves, in saving ourselves, we can re-create and save many others: whosoever will. I certainly think that this possibility ought to be kept very vividly in the forefront of our consciousness. The value of a human being is never indicated by the color of his skin; the value of a human being is all that I hold sacred; and I know that I do not become better by making another worse. One need not read the New Testament to discover that. One need only read history and look at the world—one need

only, in fact, look into one's mirror.

The specific reason for this rather long letter is the series of articles concerning the Jew in Harlem (in *Liberator* magazine). I think it is most distinctly unhelpful, and I think it is immoral, to blame Harlem on the Jew. For a man of Editor Dan Watts' experience, it is incredibly naive. Why, when we should be storming capitols, do they suggest to the people they hope to serve that we take refuge in the most ancient and barbaric of the European myths? Do they want us to become better? Or do they want us, after all, carefully manipulating the color, Black, merely to become white?

JAMES BALDWIN

Bebek, Istanbul, Turkey.

IN FEBRUARY of 1966, *Liberator*, a magazine on whose advisory board I sat, published an article, "Semitism in the Black Ghetto" by Eddie Ellis, which I felt went beyond the bounds of black nationalism. I felt it was racist and said so to the Editor, a man whom I still respect, Dan Watts. But "Semitism in the Black Ghetto" blows it for me, but good, and but definitely. This is where I get off!

If Mr. Ellis has proof of the wild and unsupported contentions that he made (how dare he charge

that W. E. B. Du Bois was "used" by "Zionists" to attack Marcus Garvey?) where is that proof? Jews are active in civil rights; Jews do have policy-making positions in civil rights organizations; Jewish philanthropies were, and still are, influential in Negro affairs. But is this due to their "evil cunning"—or to our weaknesses! Mr. Ellis says all these activities are part of a Zionist plan to make Negroes scapegoats instead of themselves. But where the hell is the proof? Mr. Ellis

doesn't even offer us a "Protocols of Zion"!

We could argue for years about what Jews have done *to* and *for* Negroes in this country; and whether what has been done has resulted in good or bad for the Negro people. But who in his right mind can argue that that which was done and is being done by Jews in particular, whether good or bad, is part of a gigantic plot to dupe and take advantage of Negroes; a deliberate, agreed-upon "Zionist," "Jewish Community," "Semitic" plot against Negroes?

Where is that proof!

I am not sentimental about Jews, Negroes, or anybody else. And I am not grateful. People should fight for freedom because they believe in freedom. I know Jews who do, and I know Jews who don't; I know Negroes who do, and I know Negroes who don't. A man should fight for what he believes in—and the fact that he fights is his reward. I owe him nothing.

Harlem is a deprived and exploited community, but are Jews the only ones who profit from this exploitation? No! Are Jews the ones who profit *most* by this exploitation? I strongly doubt it. (Mr. Ellis would have done us all a favor if he had conducted a survey to determine who, in fact, really owns Harlem.)

Whatever Jews are guilty of ex-

ploiting Harlem, are not guilty because they are Jews, but because—along with many Catholics, Protestants, Negro and white—they are exploiters. In a war against all exploiters whomsoever, I am an ally. But Mr. Ellis seems to be calling for a *war* against Jews. If that is the case, I am an enemy.

You see, I consider myself a Black Nationalist, and proud to be one . . . but not a Black racist. And I consider the difference between them too fundamental for compromise.

Black Nationalism is as legitimate and honorable a vehicle of the black man's anguish as Irish nationalism was to the Irish, and Zionism to the Jews. But *Black racism* is no different from any other racism. I think few people will doubt my love and respect for our late Brother Malcolm X. I call your attention to an article in the *New York Times* by M. S. Handler, quoting a letter he had received abroad from Malcolm. In this letter Brother Malcolm specifically renounced racism and pledged himself to spend the rest of his life making up for the *racism* he had formerly preached. That Malcolm at last became wise enough to see racism as a vicious, destructive crime against the human spirit with most frightening implications; that he sharply set it apart from nationalism; that, above all, he set out to undo the

harm he himself had done in formerly advocating black racism—is the measure of his personal integrity and his greatness as a man and as a leader.

The beauty of Brother Malcolm was that he was intelligent enough to grow away from past

errors, and to stretch out his hands towards *truth* even if they shot him down for it. Malcolm X was a Black Nationalist in the true sense of the word. Can we who love him be less?

OSSIE DAVIS
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BLACK ORACLE

HAYWOOD BURNS

I am out of Africa's dark loins
Snatched bloody from her womb
I am black and angry and beautiful and black

Look at me

I am the singer and the song
The music and the player
The dreamer and the dream

Listen to me.