



2012

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## Repository Citation

Fernheimer, Janice W., "Leading through Listening: Racial Tensions in 1968 New York" (2012). *Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies Faculty Publications*. 9.

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**Notes/Citation Information**

Published in *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism*. Edith Bruder, & Tudor Parfitt, (Eds.). p. 234-262.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# LEADING THROUGH LISTENING: RACIAL TENSIONS IN 1968 NEW YORK

JANICE W. FERNHEIMER

*Listening will be useless unless you let it change your rhetoric.*  
—Wayne Booth, *Rhetoric of Rhetoric*

If ever there was a time when listening was desperately needed, it might have been racially divided New York before, during, and after the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy. The controversy began with the New York City School Board's decision to allow African Americans community control over Brooklyn's predominantly black schools in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville area.<sup>1</sup> Once granted this community control, the black local school board promptly dismissed several white teachers and members of the white leadership.<sup>2</sup> On May 9, 1968, Fred Nauman, a Jewish junior high school science teacher and "chapter chairman of the city's ninety-percent white, and majority Jewish union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT)" was fired, and as Podair points out, "the issue of whether the black local school board could fire this Jewish, unionized teacher on its own initiative" ignited a controversy that fundamentally altered "politics, culture, and race relations in New York city."<sup>3</sup> In response, the autumn of 1968 witnessed "three city-wide teacher strikes launched by the UFT" which aimed to reinstate "Nauman and nine of his union colleagues" also fired by the Ocean Hill-Brownsville local school board.<sup>4</sup> The strikes lasted nearly two months, affected nearly one million public school children, and were deemed "the most bitter in the city's modern history, rife with charges of racism, union-busting, and anti-Semitism."<sup>5</sup>

Melissa Weiner argues that the controversy erupted not from a failure to listen or hear, but rather a failure to see the problem within the same definitional frame. On the one hand, African Americans blamed "America's racist structure for their poverty and oppression" and saw Jews as "an embodiment of this system, even if they were not wholly a part of

it”; whereas “Jews misunderstood African American’s desires for their schools and their multiculturalist demands for Black Power.”<sup>6</sup> This misunderstanding arose through “Jews’ inability to remove their newly acquired spectacles of whiteness and look at the world through the lenses of oppression worn by African Americans’ and ‘tore asunder these longstanding, though conflict-rife bonds. More than this, it cemented Jews’ racial status as whites.”<sup>7</sup> At stake in these divergent lenses were the worldviews through which each group interpreted themselves and the other stakeholders in the conflict. Race and cultural expectations were at the heart of the conflict, especially since Jews’ status in the American polity was changing so rapidly that they had not yet come to fully identify with the “whiteness” granted them.

In some ways, the failure to see and hear across cultural lines might exemplify in the negative Booth’s understanding of listening rhetoric’s high stakes:

“Unless we pay more attention to improving our communication at all levels of life, unless we study more carefully the rhetorical strategies we all depend on, consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously, we will continue to succumb to unnecessary violence, to loss of potential friends, and to the decay of community.”<sup>8</sup>

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict certainly resulted in the loss of friends and the decay of community, but at the same time it initiated the beginning of a new social reality. This reality was not, perhaps, the “colourblind” meritocracy where race ceased to matter, on the contrary, as Jews became “white” and were more likely to be perceived that way by themselves and others, race seemed to matter more than anything else. Yet while this might have been the case, since this whiteness was in flux, many American (and mostly Ashkenazi) Jews still identified primarily as marginalized “others” and in so doing failed to recognize the social privileges afforded them by their light(er) skin.

It is against this backdrop that I want to call attention to a small but important New York-based non-profit organization, which called itself by the Hebrew phrase *Hatzaad Harishon*—the First Step. This multi-racial group was formed in 1964 and lasted until 1972. It included Jews of all races, and worked tirelessly in New York’s racially fraught environment to create a “first step” toward a more inclusive notion of “Klal Yisrael” or Jewish peoplehood. The new path aimed to foster a new reality that would recognize Black and White Jews equally at least as far as “Klal Yisrael” was concerned.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I analyze three instances where white Jews’ interactions with Black Jews reflect the heightened sensitivity to

race inspired by New York's turmoil over Ocean Hill-Brownsville. First, I examine a controversy between white Jewish Yaakov Gladstone and Black Jewish Rabbi Wentworth Matthew. It was sparked by comments allegedly made by Gladstone and recorded in the minutes of the Committee on Black Jews' meeting of May 9, 1968, the very day that Nauman was dismissed. Second, I analyze a letter written by the youth advisor for Hatzaad Harishon Sybil Kaufman to Black Jewish Florence Dore who was the youth advisor for Matthew's Commandment Keepers' youth group. It was sent in late October, 1968 after two major strikes had taken place (with a third to occur shortly thereafter). Finally, I analyze excerpts from a dialogue Symposium that took place between black and white Jewish youth in January 1969. In each of these exchanges, the participants imagined that their words might positively impact the rhetorical situation they confronted, contribute toward greater cross-racial understanding, and increase collaboration toward a shared goal of cooperation and equality between Black and white Jews. Though these examples offer models for "listening rhetoric in action," they also demonstrate the limitations of such openness even when it operates at its rhetorical best. For if the speaker and audience do not already share the same values or worldview, the consensus-building such listening rhetoric can achieve is often both limited and fleeting. Consequently, these instances also call attention to listening's double-edge and the necessarily partial and incremental aspects of "hearing's" inventional power. For unless attempts at listening rhetoric are coupled with a type of conciliatory or integrative argument that both acknowledges and accounts for others' perspectives without unduly appropriating them, ironically, they may create more interference than positive rhetorical intervention.

To better understand what I mean by conciliatory argument, I borrow some terms from Barry Kroll who articulates a vision for such conciliatory rhetoric in his 2005 *Pedagogy* article, "Arguing Differently," which critically analyzes his undergraduate course with the same name.<sup>10</sup> In describing the course goals, Kroll explains that he wanted his students to understand the benefits that came from a broader understanding of what argument is. Since "traditional argument" and the adversarial tactics often associated with it had both valid uses and limitations, he wanted his students to learn alternative methods.<sup>11</sup> In order to teach these alternative methods, he broke the course into three units that explored the merits and strategies for what he termed conciliatory, integrative, and deliberative argument.<sup>12</sup> The unit on conciliatory argument focused on "how to shift from describing the opposition's view to presenting one's own," the integrative unit focused on "how to convince the parties that there was

basis for cooperation or agreement,” and the deliberative unit focused on “how to assess, reject, and endorse proposals without falling into familiar patterns of critique and rebuttal.”<sup>13</sup> Although Kroll remarked, “the three approaches were more like siblings in a family than distinct types and that certain tactics (such as conciliatory gestures) were appropriate for several” rhetorical situations, all three types prove instructive for the kind of listening rhetoric that Booth would like to see enacted. In what follows, I look at examples where individuals attempted the conciliatory and integrative types of argument that Kroll describes with greater and lesser degrees of success.<sup>14</sup>

Before I introduce the interactions I analyze, I would like first to provide a bit more background about *Hatzaad Harishon*, the particulars that gave rise to its inception, and the specific hurdles they faced in 1968 before, during, and after the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy broke out. The multi-racial Jewish non-profit organization’s name, *Hatzaad Harishon*, was chosen by Ellie Bivens to represent the difficulty involved in the first steps Black and white Jews were taking toward achieving full recognition of and legitimacy for Black Jews’ place among “klal Yisrael.”<sup>15</sup> They held their first gathering on July 12, 1964, just ten days after the Civil Rights Act was passed in the U.S. and attracted members and leaders from New York’s mainstream and mostly white or what I term “recognized” Jewish community as well as Black Jewish communities; it was the first organization of its kind where black and white Jews consciously joined forces to advocate greater recognition of and legitimacy for Black Jews. Framed by Civil Rights on the one hand and Black Power on the other, the organization eventually folded in 1972 due to a variety of factors—lack of funding and disagreement about “who is a Jew” among them. Of course, during the intervening years Israel won the Six Day War in 1967, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy broke out in 1968, and in 1969 the Hebrew Israelites, a large group of African American from Chicago, emigrated to Israel and attempted to claim Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return, a law which grants automatic Israeli citizenship to any “recognized Jew” who settles permanently in Israel.

Sandwiched between the competing narratives offered by Civil Rights and Black Power, and influenced by these other events of the late 1960s. *Hatzaad Harishon*’s organizational life was relatively short, yet it successfully supported a multi-racial adult organization and a Black Jewish dance troupe and youth group throughout its brief existence. Its members confronted numerous challenges without and within the organization. In facing the broader Jewish community of New York, *Hatzaad Harishon* struggled to gain recognition and financial support. It

was not until May 1968 that they finally were awarded a \$10,000 grant from the New York Jewish Federation, a full four years after their first meeting on July 12, 1964. They also faced difficulties within as they struggled to define who would be recognized as a Jew in light of the international attention the Hebrew Israelites' emigration had brought to this issue. Among the Black Jewish groups and organizations that were not part of *Hatzaad Harishon*, the organization struggled to gain legitimacy because initially its leadership was white.

Although they encountered difficulties along the way, by October 1968 *Hatzaad Harishon* Youth had become relatively successful in their quest to gain recognition from established Jewish communities in New York. Their relationship with other Black Jewish communities, however, was more complicated. Although the *Hatzaad Harishon* youth had discussed the issue of integration with white youth groups, and had many social functions with other white Jewish groups, they did not often, if at all, interact with the other Black Jews or Black Judaic groups in Harlem.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps most conspicuously absent from *Hatzaad Harishon's* supporters was Rabbi Matthew Wentworth and his Commandment Keepers congregation, the best known and most influential of the Black Jewish groups in New York at the time. Rabbi Matthew's congregation was one of the first to observe exclusively Jewish practices, and in 1925 R. Matthew established the Ethiopian Hebrew Rabbinical College to help train Black Jewish Rabbis and spiritual leaders.<sup>17</sup> As these spiritual leaders went on to found affiliate synagogues in other parts of New York, the U.S., and the Caribbean, Rabbi Matthew's influence was far-reaching. On two separate occasions, Rabbi Matthew attempted to gain legitimacy from the recognized Jewish community by applying for membership to the New York Board of Rabbis, first in 1931 and then again in 1952, and later he attempted to join the B'nai B'rith Lodge.<sup>18</sup> On each occasion his requests for membership were denied. Although the rationale varied, in most cases the recognized Jewish community did not accept the legitimacy of Rabbi Matthew's ordination by Rabbi Ford, a founder of Black Jewish congregation B'nai Beth Abraham and an active member of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) who moved to Addis Ababa in 1930.<sup>19</sup> Similar to some of the contested issues in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy, credentials became a key issue in Rabbi Matthew's interactions with the recognized Jewish community. Part of the breakdown stemmed from disagreement over the definition of Judaism and recognized ways of becoming ordained and thus accredited as a rabbi. Rabbi Matthew claimed Rabbi Ford's ordination was authentic, and invoked Ethiopian authorization for the ordination document Ford had

created, and attributed the failure to accept these credentials to racism. However, the New York Board of Rabbis maintained that there were no documents sanctioning his status as “Rabbi” and continued to stress that he had not attended or been approved by any recognized institution for Jewish learning.

Matthew’s 1931 attempt attracted media attention. As a result, Dr. Norman Salit, then chairperson of the American pro-Falasha Committee, visited Rabbi Matthew’s congregation in November and December.<sup>20</sup> Dr. Salit “bitterly denounced” Rabbi Matthew’s congregation, along with several other Black Jewish groups in Harlem, for having “faked Jewish services that appeal to the childish and simple hearted.”<sup>21</sup> Worse still, Dr. Salit said that Harlem synagogues “are not Jewish. The services are hybrid and mongrel, but they are faked...The Harlem temples are grotesque phenomena rising out of the mystic sensitivity of the Afro-Americans played upon by charlatans” (quoted in Landing 207). According to Landing, “Rabbi Matthew rose to the defense and challenged Dr. Salit’s observations” and even offered to “debate him on the issues at any convenient place,” but Dr. Salit did not accept the challenge.<sup>22</sup> Shortly after Salit’s attack, other critiques followed, and Landing argues that “Black Jews [became] a simple curiosity in the eyes of white Jews” as a consequence.<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, relations between the established Jewish community and Rabbi Wentworth Matthew’s congregation were tense at best. As Landing astutely points out, “It would not be until the Civil Rights era of the 1950s when white Jews became aware of a rise of anti-Semitism in the black community that Black Judaism was offered a new look, although primarily as a base for Jews to gain an ally in the black community.”<sup>24</sup>

After these early attempts to gain acceptance had been rebuffed, Rabbi Matthew became understandably bitter and kept his congregation largely separate from the white Jewish mainstream. In a December 26, 1966 *Newsweek* article, “The Black Jews,” Rabbi Matthew complained, “Some years ago, the New York Board of Rabbis rejected my application for membership” and since then “we have learned to do for ourselves, and now every Tom, Dick and Harry wants to take credit for it.”<sup>25</sup> Ever since the dispute with the Board of Rabbis concerning his qualifications, Rabbi Matthew and his congregation were no longer interested in trying to gain recognition from the mainstream community. This separatist attitude, like that reflected by the local school board in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy, was not well-received by the recognized, mainstream Jewish community in general or *Hatzaad Harishon* and its then-white leadership in particular.



In Spring 1968 there was a serious miscommunication between Yaakov Gladstone, then executive director of *Hatzaad Harishon*, and Rabbi Matthew, and though Gladstone attempted to offer an apology the disagreement resulted in further distance between *Hatzaad Harishon* and Rabbi Matthew's congregation. The disagreement is recorded in the May and June minutes from the Committee on the Black Jews, a subcommittee of the Commission of Synagogue Relations (a branch of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies), and two letters sent from Gladstone to Matthews.<sup>26</sup> The May 9, 1968 Minutes report that "Mr. Yaakov Gladstone the director of *Hatzaad Harishon*, noted that the Committee on the Black Jews had appointed a bigoted Black Nationalist, Rabbi Wentworth Mathews [sic], as its co-chairman."<sup>27</sup> Martin Warmbrand protested at this classification, and the minutes take special care to note parenthetically that "Rabbi Mathews' appointment was made unanimously by a committee attended by a majority of *Hatzaad Harishon* Board members."<sup>28</sup> The Committee asked Gladstone to formally apologize to Rabbi Matthew, and he complied.<sup>29</sup>

Gladstone sent his first letter of apology on June 14, 1968. Attempting to "set the record straight", he explained that he was "misunderstood and misquoted in a discussion regarding your [Matthew's] leadership role in the Black Jewish Community."<sup>30</sup> He continues: "Because I know of your dedicated endeavors in the past, as well as your abiding concern for the future of black Jewry, I want to apologize to you and hope that we will work together in the future for the cause that is our common concern."<sup>31</sup> Gladstone closes the letter wishing Matthew a "healthy summer."<sup>32</sup> Although Rabbi Matthew's response was not in the archives, neither he nor the Committee was satisfied with Gladstone's initial apology. The June 26, 1968 minutes to the Committee on Black Jews report that "The grant to *Hatzaad Harishon*. . . had been held up by Federation pending apology" but the grant was then reinstated after Matthew received Gladstone's letter; however, it was not satisfactory because the minutes continue, "[o]bjections were raised as to Mr. Gladstone's claim that he was misunderstood in his remarks" and "Rabbi Irving Block raised a protest asking for apology acceptable to Rabbi Matthew." Gladstone's second letter to Matthew, dated June 25, 1968, first thanks Rabbi Matthew for his response on June 18, 1968 and then continues:

"It is precisely I and my fellow workers of *Hatzaad Harishon* [sic] do not want friction but rather understanding and cooperation between the black and white Jews that we have been trying these past five years to instill upon you and other Spiritual Leaders of the Black Jewish communities, the vital importance of working together."<sup>33</sup>

Although Gladstone's desire for "cooperation" and "understanding" is clear, so is his frustration. He emphasizes the importance of working together, but his use of the phrase "instill upon" suggests to Rabbi Matthew and the other leaders that Gladstone's method might have been perceived as "less cooperative" than Gladstone intended. To "instill upon" suggests that one group is doing the instilling to another, and there is no equality in the actions. Instead the group doing the instilling behaves in a paternalistic way toward the group on its receiving end, and of course it goes without saying that if one must instill the importance "of cooperation" on another individual or group, then the action becomes far less cooperative. Although Gladstone's letter might first appear to be an attempt at listening rhetoric, he does not acknowledge the way that his intentions might have been perceived differently by Rabbi Matthew.

Gladstone offers further elaboration to explain how he was "misrepresented in the minutes." His explanation, however, employs the topos of cause and consequence to essentially blame Rabbi Matthew for denying his community the "privilege" of getting involved with Klal Yisrael:

"Since *you have chosen* to remain to keep your congregation separate from Klal Yisrael and since *through your actions* your congregants and their children are being *denied access* to the very many educational, cultural and social activities which Hatzaaad Harishon offers as well as the very many beautiful Jewish experiences which the Jewish Community of New York offers."<sup>34</sup>

Gladstone illustrates how he misunderstands R. Matthew's desire to keep his congregation separate from Klal Yisrael. Rather than acknowledging the positive benefits such separation might offer, Gladstone uses cause/consequence to attribute Rabbi Matthew's decision to remain separate as something that has had negative consequences on Matthew's community. But Gladstone's whole frame of evaluation presumes that Rabbi Matthew wants his community to be part of *Klal Yisrael*, something that Matthews might have desired at one point, but which he clearly spurned after the New York Board of Rabbis rejected his appeals for recognition. Although Gladstone attempts to offer an apology, he fundamentally misunderstands Rabbi Matthew's desire for independence from, rather than integration into the recognized Jewish community.

Instead, Gladstone continues to use cause/consequence to explain his interpretation of the established Jewish community's reaction to Matthew's separation:

*"It is felt in many quarters of the Jewish Community that you espoused Black Nationalistic and almost bigoted feelings toward the rest of the Jewish Community. At the meeting which was held at the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, I tried to convey this message. I did not say that I feel that way. I certainly did not call you 'a black egotist nationalist anti-semite.'"*<sup>35</sup>

In fact, even the minutes did not report Gladstone as having uttered those exact words, though the fact that Gladstone quotes this specific phrase in his own letter suggests that the quoted material came from the letter R. Matthew sent to him. Rather than taking personal ownership of or accountability for expressing that R. Matthew "espoused Nationalistic and bigoted feelings toward" Klal Yisrael, Gladstone uses the passive voice to place the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the "Jewish community" and differentiate himself from it, insisting instead that he, Gladstone, *did not* say he felt that way. Then, Gladstone reassures R. Matthew that

*"...the minutes? which misinterpreted and misquoted what I said will never find its way into any newspaper [sic] or periodicals. I also want to assure you that on my part, I still admire all that you have done for the black Jewish People and once again I reiterate the sincerest and deepest desire of the leadership of Hatzad Harishon to work with you for the good and welfare of all Jews. I once again apologize if I in any way insulted you or caused you hurt. It was certainly unintentional."*<sup>36</sup>

Oddly enough if Gladstone had begun where he ended—with a clear, conciliatory appeal and acknowledgment of the hurt feelings his words had caused, his apologies might have been better received. Although he was trying to engage in listening rhetoric, he got caught up in defending his stance and stating his position first so that he could explain how his position was mis-represented rather than focusing on personal responsibility for the unintended negative effects and the conciliatory tone necessary for an apology that might have had a greater chance of being heard by its intended audience. As Kroll remarks:

*"If the writer begins an essay on a divisive topic by asserting a strong thesis or by engaging in refutation, a likely outcome is a defensive response that leads, in many cases, to what might be called oppositional gridlock. . . .the alternative . . . is a conciliatory stance in which the goal is to get people who disagree with you to listen rather than to respond defensively."*<sup>37</sup>

In the case of Gladstone and Matthew, the “divisive topic” was the content of the minutes, the intention behind them, and the racist assumptions expressed within them. Since Gladstone begins his second apology by asserting his position and refuting claims, it is not surprising that relations between Hatzad Harishon and Rabbi Matthew’s congregation chilled considerably as a consequence. The distance between them persisted, even though Matthew played an instrumental role in training several prominent Black Jewish members of Hatzad Harishon. Rabbi Matthew had taught Hebrew to Esther Bibbins, the first President of Hatzad Harishon, a black Jewish woman who had converted to orthodox Judaism, and he had also trained another prominent member black Jewish Rabbi Moshe Hailu Paris. Despite these significant contributions to the Jewish education of prominent Hatzad members, Rabbi Matthew was reluctant to endorse Hatzad Harishon or to encourage his congregational members to participate in Hatzad’s activities.

Given this heated exchange between the male leaders of the respective groups, it is not surprising that relations between the organizations were minimal. Perhaps what is surprising is the active role female leadership played in attempting to lead the groups down another path. The following letter from white Jewish Sybil Kaufman, then youth advisor of Hatzad Harishon, to Black Jewish Florence Dore, who was not only Rabbi Matthew’s daughter but also the youth advisor for Rabbi Matthew’s congregation’s youth group, suggests that Hatzad Harishon very much wanted to mend relations with Rabbi Matthew’s congregation and that a more explicitly conciliatory approach was necessary to first build trust and establish common ground.<sup>38</sup> Kaufman’s October 24, 1968 letter to Florence Dore makes no mention of the specific conditions that caused the “strained relations” between the two groups, but it does present an example of the potential power of “listening rhetoric” inflected with a conciliatory attitude. Here, Kaufman’s goal is to preserve the relationship between the groups and keep the “lines of communication open” rather than to win “a particular dispute.”<sup>39</sup> By using conciliatory argument Kaufman works as a skilled rhetor to engage in listening rhetoric and attempt to build bridges to R. Matthews’s community. The impetus for the letter was a “lengthy discussion” on the phone that the women had shared.<sup>40</sup> The details of the phone conversation are not mentioned, but it was clearly inspiring enough to prompt Kaufman to write to Dore “personally.”

Unlike Gladstone who hopes to “instill upon” Rabbi Wentworth and his community, Kaufman addresses her letter to Florence Dore as an

equal. She begins the letter by calling attention to the shared ground their phone conversation uncovered:

"I think the one idea that reoccurred in my mind this afternoon after we spoke was that if *you and I*, the advisors of our two groups, could sit and talk *as we did* and *could agree on so many points as we did* and could be so frank with each other, then *it must be you and I* as the advisors who will work to bridge the gap that exists between our groups."<sup>41</sup>

Kaufman begins with "you and I" and directs her letter to Dore as an equal, from youth advisor to youth advisor. She twice repeats "as we did" to emphasize how they were able to both "sit and talk" and also "to agree on so many points." More than that, Kaufman underscores how the two women were able to be "frank with each other." Given the history of conflict and lack of face-to-face contact between competing Black Jewish groups in general and these two groups in particular, this "frankness" is especially noteworthy and commendable.<sup>42</sup> Based on this shared ground of agreement, Kaufman suggests that she and Dore should be the ones to work to "bridge the gap" between their communities.

In what follows, Kaufman's appeals to Dore read as a "textbook example" of listening rhetoric. They exemplify the key elements that Kroll associates with the conciliatory approach where a writer begins with "gestures of empathy or respect" or when the writer "call[s] the reader's attention to an urgent problem, thereby moving the focus away from the contentious debate about how to solve it."<sup>43</sup> As Kroll points out, this strategy can work in conciliatory, integrative, and deliberative arguments alike, and it is especially useful if "a writer is trying to reconcile and integrate positions on a particularly hot topic or one that has reached a state of gridlock," for if a rhetor confronts such circumstances, "it's often useful to shift attention away from the immediate controversy to a larger or more significant problem: the aim is to build some initial agreement that something has to be done."<sup>44</sup> And this is precisely the rhetorical strategy that Kaufman employs in her letter to Florence Dore.

She begins with the shared ground they established orally, reiterates the "we" their two communities could form, attempts to describe one of the misunderstandings and where it stems from, and then ends with a call for action. Kaufman writes: "*We* both agreed that there were *so many prejudices, so much misinformation, so many misunderstandings* between your superiors and mine, your youth's parents and mine that having these filter down to our youth has caused feelings which we should try to erase."<sup>45</sup> Kaufman again begins with "we" and then underscores how the two women "agreed" about how much "misinformation" and

“misunderstanding” had circulated among the various members of their communities. She calls attention to the “superiors” and the “youth’s parents” in both groups to demonstrate how muddled the lines of communication had become and also to emphasize how direct communication might provide a remedy. Although she does not specify the kind of “feelings” that needed to be “erased,” she suggests that the misinformation that produced such bad feelings could be eliminated through direct communication.

Once she has established the need for direct communication, Kaufman repeats how direct communication such as that which she shared with Dore on the phone helps to foster mutual understanding. Then she explains how the two groups could be seen as complimentary rather than competitive:

*“We were both frank in our aims. You feel that your youth do achieve much from their group and I’m sure they do just as I expressed what advantages our group had as a supplement to members’ religious affiliations and congregations. We are a community movement not a religious one and thus we strive to serve community goals.”<sup>46</sup>*

Kaufman emphasizes the shared value of the groups’ activities. As she advocates for Dore to allow her youths to participate in Hatzaad’s activities in addition to their religious congregations’ activities, Kaufman emphasizes that Hatzaad is not a religious organization, but rather a “community movement” striving to serve *community* needs. Her use of the word *community* is ambiguous and could mean either the recognized “Jewish” community or the “Black Jewish community,” or both. Given the context, it seems she might mean the Black Jewish community, but the ambiguity in the terms opens the possibility for a new identification—for Dore and Matthew’s congregation to see themselves as part of not just the Black Jewish community, but Klal Yisrael and the broader Jewish community as well. Now that Kaufman has created the rhetorical space for a new identification, one that moves beyond individual organizations to a more inclusive sense of Klal Yisrael, she emphasizes the shared ground of motherhood and advising and speaks from personal experience. She writes:

*“As both a mother and youth worker you bring many skills to your group. As a youth worker, I too bring background and skills to my group. My point to you was that your group should not feel that the work of ours is an overlapping of yours not a substitute for yours: your members could easily find themselves in our group learning and facing experiences completely unique from those they derive in their synagogue group. As a teenager,*

myself, I belonged to a synagogue youth group, a community youth organization and a Zionist youth organization. Each one afforded me *different* experiences, *different* friends and I both gave and received *different* things from each one."<sup>47</sup>

Kaufman emphasizes the equal footing of their status by employing parallel structure in the sentences she uses to describe their respective roles. She then draws from her personal experience of participating in multiple youth groups, repeating the word "different" three times to demonstrate how the more groups she was active in, the more she gained personally. Since she has set the argument up to show how their experiences are similar as mothers and advisors, her rationale that her experiences as a youth involved in multiple youth groups was beneficial can be extrapolated to apply to Dore and the youth Dore advises as well. Kaufman strategically structures her letter in this way to advocate for and explain how the youth in Dore's group could participate in their synagogue group, which Dore leads, *and* Hatzaad Harishon without any detriment to the things they were learning at home or in their synagogue. Rather than seeing these experiences as detracting from or substituting for the youth's experiences in their home congregation, Kaufman advocates that participation in Hatzaad would only increase the diversity and value of the youths' experiences. This is an especially commendable point given how proprietary most Black Jewish leaders felt about their respective community members.

In his strategies for conciliatory argument, Kroll recognizes that though "there is no formula for every case" he and his class determined that "it was usually best to reveal one's viewpoint early in an essay" because by "stating it simply and succinctly while keeping the focus on a fair-minded presentation of the view with which you disagree, "the author neither hides his or her view from readers" nor does he or she "advocate [his or her] position until later in the essay."<sup>48</sup> He notes:

"Even if the writer forecasts his or her position, many conciliatory essays break into two parts: an initial section in which the writer empathizes with the opposition's concerns, demonstrates a clear understanding of opposing arguments, and acknowledges (when possible) the contexts in which the opposition's position might be appropriate; and a second part in which the writer explains, in a parallel fashion, that he or she has somewhat different concerns, leading to a different position that is valid in a particular context or problematic situation."<sup>49</sup>

Kaufman's approach with Dore seems to fall under the rubric that Kroll has eloquently articulated. Moreover, Kroll suggests that the writer

should “capitalize on the leverage of fairness at the point of transition between these sections” because

“...[a] lot depends on the way the writer approaches the tricky moment of transition. As Richard Coe (1992) has noted if the turn is abrupt, the reader may feel vulnerable; it’s as though the writer signals a truce, gets the opponent to let down his guard, and then exploits this attitude of receptivity to score a quick punch. If the reader feels manipulated, any impulse toward reciprocity is lost.”<sup>50</sup>

But Kaufman navigates this transition deftly. In the latter section of the letter, she makes this transition by moving from the shared territory of their personal experiences to that of the future actions the groups might take together, actions toward the more inclusive sense of Klal Yisrael she has already imagined and articulated. First, she reiterates their agreed interpretation of the messy state of Black Jewish affairs:

“As we both also *agreed*, there is *enough* dissention in the world, *enough* hate and distrust to have such between fellow Jews. You and I both felt that *only through direct communication will the problems of the world be solved*—not through revolt or revolution or rioting or speaking evil behind each other’s backs.”<sup>51</sup>

Her repetition of the word “enough” and her parallel structure emphasize the terms of agreement she and Dore arrived at on the phone. She sets up a contrast between the possibility of solving problems through direct communication or creating further misunderstanding through “revolt, revolution, rioting.” After drawing this distinction, she underscores the importance and benefit of direct communication between the youth groups, “My young people are young adults capable of holding their own, as are your [sic], capable of communicating with others, of speaking their minds, of *looking for common ground on which to build not to destroy*.” Here she again reiterates their shared interpretation of the problem and the equal capabilities of both youth groups to build common ground, before she goes on to suggest a way to solve the problem:

“As we said, most of your youth have never come face to face with ours, they have never questioned whether the *untruths which have come to their ears have foundations*. The same is true of my youth. They believe the words of their parents and they have not sought the truth for themselves. Both our groups are old enough to question, to seek the truth. *This can only be done through direct confrontation and communication*.”<sup>52</sup>



In words remarkably similar to those Booth employs nearly 40 years later, Kaufman asserts that the time has come for both Dore's and Hatzaad's youth to "seek the truth" through "direct confrontation and communication." In the closing part of the letter, Kaufman suggests that the two groups should meet either at Dore's synagogue, the YM-YWHA, or the *moadon* (clubhouse) that Hatzaad Harishon youth use, to have "an open and frank discussion and get to know each other."<sup>53</sup> She concludes with an inclusive repetition of "all of us" and an appeal to the groups' shared status as Jews: "All of us follow the same way of life, we are all part of the same peoplehood. 'Have we not all one father? H[sic] at not one g-d Created us?'"<sup>54</sup> Her repetition of "us" and "we" show how she sees both her group and Dore's group as part of the same Jewish people. She closes the letter with a personalized call: "Florence, let us as mature, adults, as advisors to those who seek our assistance, take this step; let us do all that we can to influence our youth to come together, just as we did on the phone, to speak their minds, to get to know one another, to eradicate the mistrust, injustice and misunderstanding which their elders have perpetuated."<sup>55</sup> She hopes to encourage Dore based on the positive interaction in listening rhetoric that they had shared on the phone, and she argues it is possible for their youth to meet and "eradicate the misunderstanding their elders have perpetuated."

Both Gladstone's and Kaufman's letters invoke different approaches to the rhetoric of reconciliation, approaches which reflect their attitudes toward their relationship with Rabbi Matthews and his community. While Gladstone's apologies reflect an air of paternalism that suggests a superior-inferior relationship, Kaufman's letter to Dore reflects an attitude of collaborative equality. Both were penned by Hatzaad Harishon's white leadership in attempts to reach out to Rabbi Matthew and his community. Kaufman's letter offers a much more conciliatory and collaborative approach, enacting the kind of shared responsibility for working toward greater Klal Yisrael that she was inviting Dore to take part in.

While it is unclear whether or not the two youth groups ever met as a consequence of Kaufman's letter, it is clear that Kaufman and the Hatzaad Harishon youth strongly believed in the revolutionary power of dialogue. If perhaps this promise remained untested with other Black Jewish youths, on January 5, 1969, they attempted to put their beliefs into practice when five Jewish youths, black and white, gathered to discuss the topic "Negroes and Jews in America" and other issues that were of common concern to Black and white Jewish communities alike.<sup>56</sup> The dialogue was sponsored by *Our Age*, a monthly magazine published by the Reform Movement for Jewish Youth, and excerpts from the conversation were

later published in the February 16, 1969 issue.<sup>57</sup> Two of the youths were white and Jewish: Rick Hoffman, a senior at Pirkiomen, a private school in Pottstown, PA and Sarrae Crane, a junior at Tresper Clarke High School in Westbury, NY. Three youths were black and Jewish and members of Hatzaad Harishon: Allen (Avraham) Terry, a senior at Weequahic High School in Newark, NJ; Sarah Bibbins, a junior at Seward Park High School in New York City; and Pat (Peninah) Terry a junior at Rutgers University in Newark, NJ. Although Allen and Pat introduced themselves as such, throughout the dialogue they and the other participants referred to them as Avraham and Peninah respectively. The moderator was Sybil Kaufman, then-youth advisor for Hatzaad Harishon, though she would step down from her position just days before the dialogue was published in *Our Age* in February 1969.

The original transcript was 42 pages long, and of these, a mere four pages were actually published in the magazine.<sup>58</sup> The dialogue covered a broad range of topics: inter-faith dating, inter-racial dating, being the only Jew in a non-Jewish suburb, what it's like to be Black and Jewish, the nature of Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights movement, the nature of the Black Power movement, and the need for more dialogue and direct communication between Black and white Jews. While the transcript merits greater scholarly attention in its own right, this discussion will focus on three main parts: 1) the nature of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement and its relationship to Jewish identity, 2) the nature of the Black Power movement and the need for blacks to develop independence, and 3) the closing summary comments which testify to the value of the dialogue itself. The dialogue illustrates that listening rhetoric can work to broach new understandings and negotiate new, shared territory, but it also demonstrates the limitations of even successful dialogues of this sort.

In this first segment, white Jewish Rick, and black Jewish Sarah and Peninah broach the controversial issue of Jewish involvement in Civil Rights and the relationship between that movement and the Black Power movement. Rick has transitioned from white, Jewish Sarrae's observation that many people do not see a need for contemporary religion to discuss the role Jews played in the Civil Rights movement. He raises the question of why Jews were ultimately pushed out of Civil Rights organizations:

Rick: "Discussing civil rights from a Jewish viewpoint. . . in the early civil rights movement, look how many white Jews were involved. And then they were sort of siphoned out of SNCC, out of CORE no longer allowed to be there [sic]. Well, why?. . . Why were the Jews thrown out of these organizations?"<sup>59</sup>

He begins with a question that many white Jews had, given that in 1969, Jewish involvement in Civil Rights organizations was already resisted and questioned by African-Americans.<sup>60</sup> Rick's use of the words "siphoned out," "thrown out," and "no longer allowed to be there" suggest that he felt that this shift in emphasis was not one that Jews voluntarily participated in. Sarah Bibbins responds to his question by explaining black people's desire for independence:

Sarah: "Because the black people felt that all their lives, whenever they wanted something, *they had to turn to somebody*, whether they were white Jews or just plain white. *They had to turn to them* to have them help them. So they thought that now with the times *they should stand up on their own two feet, and accomplish something and say, well, look, we, in my community, we did it.* They could tell their friends *they did it all alone* without saying we had the help of somebody. . . it makes you more independent when you can say, well, I built this house and *I built it all by myself*, instead of turning around and saying, well, I built most of it but this white person helped me to do it."<sup>61</sup>

Sarah explains how important it is for anyone to feel like she or he has the autonomy necessary to accomplish tasks without depending on someone else. Although she employs the example of building a house, her repetition of phrases like "stand on their own two feet," "they did it alone," "makes you feel independent," and "I built it all by myself" underscore how she thought it was important for African Americans to feel they could accomplish things without the help of whites or white Jews. Rick concedes that independence is important, but expresses fear that too much independence results in isolation and "schism." The conversation rises in intensity as the two question and answer one another, expressing their different "realities":

Rick: "This if fine to begin with. Right. A person has to have pride and has to believe in himself. But what happens when they've begun doing this and then everything they do has to be done by themselves? When black has to build his own house [sic], build his own community, man his own community and can accept nothing from the outside. Then we have a schism..."

Sarah: "That's right. It's because he wants to feel he's done it all himself."

Rick: "But what happens when we've gotten to the point where there's nothing where they'll interact? Where it's two separate societies? Is there what we're moving towards [sic]?"

Sarah: "No, I feel that we're trying to move towards a united society between black and white, but it's just..."

Rick: "United through separation?"<sup>62</sup>

Rick and Sarah volley back and forth, as Sarah struggles to articulate why it is so important for blacks to feel independent and how that independence might come at the expense of collaboration, and Rick expresses the threat that black independence presents for his idea of an integrated society. Although Rick expresses this concern in regard to Blacks and Jews in the Civil Rights movement, his concern echoes the kind of anxiety Gladstone expressed when Rabbi Matthew insisted on preserving his Black Jewish congregation's separateness, though the attitude with which Rick approaches the other youths emulates more of Sybil's sense of equality. It is not until Peninah chimes in, adding a third voice to the mix, that the context for Sarah's point is deepened:

Peninah: "I don't think it's a separation policy. This is what everybody says *all of a sudden* because of the fact that it is occurring. It seems that the black man *all of a sudden* wants to do things on his own. I think previously, when he relied on the whites, he didn't get as much accomplished. He would say, would you help me build this house—let's take an example. All right, we'll do it next week. Then postpone it. It will be—next week will come and he'll say, next month. Then the next month will come and he'd say, next year. Eventually it would get done, but it would take such a long time. This reliance on other people. . .there's a statement that goes "if you want things done well, you do it yourself." And this is what the black man's policy is now. *It's not just because he's black or anything like that. It's because he wants to, for a change, rely on his own people and bring his own people in.* You see, what was happening was that you'd only get the intelligent bourgeois black man into these movements, like CORE and NAACP. The ignorant masses would still be left out. This is part of the reasoning behind, okay, let's forget about the whites for a while, Jew or otherwise and let's bring the masses into these movements. As sort of a replacement."<sup>63</sup>

Peninah attempts to put blacks' desire for independence into deeper historical context. Her use of the language of the time highlights the differing perceptions among white and Blacks. While whites perceived Black desire for independence to have occurred "all of a sudden," Blacks understood this desire as long existent and all the more necessary in light of the reluctance or postponement of outside help from whites or others. Peninah returns to the house-building example and stresses how easy it is for whites to postpone action on something that does not affect them in the same material way. She emphasizes that it is not that blacks "all of sudden" want independence, but rather that independence was something that everyone wants, and only now were blacks able to articulate more strongly for it. She also explains how it is not just up to a few educated

elites, whether Black or white, but rather that for her it's important that the movement include the masses. Both she and Sarah attempt to explain to Rick how blacks interpreted the situation differently. And because multiple points of view from both Black and white Jews are expressed, together they arrive at different conclusions that each individual participant interprets through his or her own worldview.

Throughout the entire dialogue one of the main points that the Black Jewish youths reiterate is how it is impossible for them to be seen as anything but black. Sarah explains how everyone "busybodies" when she enters an unfamiliar synagogue, and when Kaufman asks Avraham if he would prefer to be "just Jewish," he cannot even fathom the question—he cannot imagine what it would be like to live in a world where race didn't matter. In this particular part of the conversation, Kaufman attempts to reign the conversation back to the topic of Black Jews in particular to see how they fit into the conversation about Black Power:

Moderator: "Where does the black Jew fit into all of this?"

Peninah: "The black Jew basically fights for the same things. Because it goes back to that what you're seen as first. At first you're always seen as a black man. . . The black man has to fight—he believes in black power that part of black power that says we need selfpride, we need self determination. This is the part of black power he believes in. So this is where the black Jews fits in. He's both black and Jewish."<sup>64</sup>

Peninah reiterates that it "goes back to that what you're seen as first," and reminds the white participants that Black Jews are always seen as "blacks first." As black individuals, Black Jews need "self pride" and "self determination" just as non-Jewish blacks do. Kaufman intervenes to push the conversation toward action—how might a new reality be created? She begins by explaining how Jews have always had "this kinship with his fellow Jew[s]".<sup>65</sup> She explains that when "two Jews meet, there's like something clicks between the two [sic]" but when Black Jews are added to the equation, the Black Jew has to "sort of prove himself before there can be that click. What do we do?" In his response to Kaufman's question, Rick demonstrates how he has truly been listening hard and well to his Black Jewish peers. He says:

"I think we've answered that, really, by saying that you see a person is black before you see a person is Jewish. Or you see someone by their skin color before you know their religion. And while you're still accepting people at that face value, how can you recognize them for anything deeper. . . you know. . . Jews are just like everyone else in that sense, they're subject to the social norms of the day. They must register you as

black before they register you as Jewish but you know this is ignorance too and we have to work at this.”<sup>66</sup>

Although Rick clearly has understood the intractability of black difference, he has little to suggest by means of changing it other than “we have to work at this.” What is valuable about his response, however, is how he takes responsibility for Jews who are “subject to the social norms of the day” and admits in these implicit terms the insidiousness of racism. His perception of the unavoidability of these racist inclinations is reflected in his use of the word “must” when he describes how “they” (white Jews) register “you” (black Jews) as black first. But his commitment to “work at this” suggests his optimistic belief that it might be possible to overcome such inherent racism among Jews. Interestingly his language reflects both an identification and dis-identification with white Jews’ implicit racism. On the one hand he uses the third person plural “they” to distinguish himself from those white Jews who see Black Jews as Black first, but in the middle of the sentence he switches to the more inclusive “we” acknowledging his own participation in this cultural logic and responsibility for working to change it. Later in the conversation, Rick begins to synthesize some of the statements that Peninah and Sarah had made earlier regarding the need for black independence, and wonders what that need for independence might have in common with Black Jewishness:

Rick: “The fact that blacks embrace Judaism to a greater extent, could that possibly be because of the fact that they are black, they feel that in this society they don’t have the proper recognition and so they turn to Judaism as an identity symbol, as something that will give them their sense of pride, their sense of being.”

Sarah: “Yeah, I think so.”

Peninah: “I don’t know. I wouldn’t say that, blacks turn to Judaism for identity, sense of pride. You mean black Jews. I wouldn’t say that a black would necessarily convert to Judaism...”

Rick: “I mean the blacks that accepted Judaism. Did they accept it...now that they’ve accepted it, has that become their symbol of identity? Is that more important? Because Judaism is a way of life so it’s obvious that it is very important as an identity symbol.”<sup>67</sup>

Although Rick raises a question that contemporary scholars, more than 40 years later, continue to ask, he doesn’t really receive a decisive response. While Sarah agrees with him, Peninah argues that he might have a point but quickly suggests that “a black would [not] necessarily convert to Judaism.” What is interesting about Rick’s response is that even though earlier in the conversation he acknowledged that it is impossible for Black

Jews to be seen as Jews first, he still wants to *believe* that Black Jews see *themselves* as Jews first, “because Judaism is a way of life” and an “important. . . identity symbol.”

Of course the question of seeing and seeing differently is what prompted not only the Symposium discussion, but also the analysis I present in this chapter. Here Rick expresses a desire for Jewishness to become the dominant identity lens through which Black Jews perceive themselves and other people perceive them, and perhaps, through primarily identifying as Jews gaining access to the social privileges and acceptance he sees attendant with white Jewishness. For him, this move to privilege Jewishness seems to offer an opportunity to move away from the marked discourse of race, a move that he values as positive. Yet it is precisely the issue of race that the Black Jews seem so intent on preserving. In what follows I discuss the limitations of listening rhetoric, especially when what Ratcliffe terms the cultural logic of colorblindness comes into play.

### **“Each time you go out and talk, you learn a little bit more”: Reflections on the Possibilities and Limitations of Dialogue**

At the close of the dialogue, all of the participants remarked positively on their experiences. Each person suggested that he or she learned something new. Kaufman says: “As far as the things we accomplished today, I think this was a very good discussion, because *I think that I know a lot about this type of discussion, but I did learn here...*”<sup>68</sup> In spite of her varied experiences with such activities and her self-reflection that she already knows about these types of interactions, she says that even she learned, though she doesn’t specify what, at least initially. Sarrae, one of the white Jewish youths remarks, “*I gained a lot*, because I didn’t know too much about the problems of the black Jews. I didn’t know too much about them at all. It’s the first time I’ve actually had a chance to talk *with them*. *I gained a lot* in understanding... and just the idea of being together, and talking is something.” Although this was her first time encountering Black Jews, she twice repeats the fact that she “gained a lot in understanding.” She claims that “just the idea of being together, and talking is something.” But what kind of something is it? And what kind of understanding can one gain from a single interaction?

I will return to these questions in a moment, but offer this tentative answer: the understandings gained by white and Black participants are different and come with different potential benefits and risks to each.

Moreover, in terms of listening rhetoric, each individual participant, whether black or white, can only be influenced by the discourse to the extent that she or he is willing to open herself to hearing it, regardless of whether or not it conforms to his or her preconditioned expectations. To illustrate this point, I call attention to Avraham's remarks, because he is more detailed in explaining what he learned:

"I think this is a very interesting discussion and Rick I learned something about *your community* and some more about the white Jews—their problems. I know just the general problems Jews have but I understand some of the problems white Jews have now. I think it was very interesting and I learned a lot."<sup>69</sup>

He twice repeats the fact that the conversation was interesting and that he learned something, and specifies a distinction between his black Jewish community and the others' "your" white Jewish community and its problems. Rick responds, "What I really think is important and has to come out of this conference is a willingness on our part to have confrontation of white Jews and black Jews to interchange ideas, to come together to live together. Because we must realize that we can't improve the situation if we're not ready to get down and talk to each other."<sup>70</sup> Rick, like Kaufman and later Booth, praises the coming together to "talk to each other" and goes on to suggest a reciprocal relationship of "interchanging ideas" and "living together." Black Jewish Sarah concurs with Avraham that, ". . . it was a very interesting talk," and though like Kaufman it was not her first time participating she remarks: "Each time you go out and talk, you learn a little bit more."<sup>71</sup> Of course, what each participant learns and gains in terms of listening rhetoric depends on the position in which she or he is situated and the potential openness she or he brings to the discussion. While the youth banter back and forth, modifying and adjusting their arguments in response to one another, the moderator Kaufman, seems to miss some of the key points of the dialogue, as illustrated by her concluding remarks. In spite of all the conversation to the contrary which suggested that skin color was eminently important, in the closing remarks to the conversation, Kaufman remarks:

"I know that members of our group often say that we'd like to be an example to the world because we'd like to show them that *as Jews we have so much in common that our color is irrelevant*—whether I'm white and you're black and you're black and I'm white. And I think that this discussion has shown that it's communication, it's dialogue, it's sitting



around and exchanging ideas that are going to make for a better tomorrow.”<sup>72</sup>

Although her last words are meant to seem optimistic, that “sitting around and exchanging ideas” can help make for a “better tomorrow,” they also point to the limitations of dialogue and the different benefits it offers to participants with different degrees of power. Even after what seems to be a model case of listening rhetoric, where all parties seem genuinely engaged in the act of listening to and learning from the other, at the conversation’s end Kaufman still insists that as Jews, color can become “irrelevant.” While Kaufman believes this race-free future is a noble vision to aspire and work toward, it’s unclear how the simple exchange of ideas can help bring the requisite changes to make her vision of a “better tomorrow” a reality. In fact, the content of the symposium belies this hope and actually demands that Sybil and other white Jews who share such hopes and beliefs, *hear and see* something else—that race and independence *do matter*, that understanding that they matter is perhaps the crucial possibility such dialogues offer, especially for the white people participating in them, and that perhaps, acknowledging *how* they matter is the first step in “learning a bit more” about what might facilitate material changes that will enable them to matter differently. The fact that race matters and has different effects on white and black people should not prevent Blacks and whites (Jewish or not) from gathering to discuss and interchange ideas about how they could matter less, or at least differently, but it does require that participants recognize the existence of difference.

In glossing over the very important differences so clearly expressed by the Black Jewish youth—Sarah, Peninah and Avraham—Kaufman participates in a cultural logic of colorblindness. As Ratcliffe explains, many white people function “as if such [colorblind] ideals were reality” and in so doing “many well-meaning people promote gender-blindness and color-blindness as ‘solutions’ to the ‘problems’ of gender and racial differences. But despite good intentions, these blindnesses mostly reinforce the status quo....”<sup>73</sup> To the extent that Kaufman concludes the discussion with such a “colorblind” summation, she draws attention *away* from the very important and mutually influential aspects of the dialogue that the youth call attention *to* in their remarks.<sup>74</sup> Thus for Kaufman, the Symposium dialogue demonstrates the persistence and strength of her colorblind assumptions, even in the face of direct evidence and testimony to their failure to accord with the experienced social reality of the Black Jewish youth. This failure to see and hear eventually had material effects for both Sybil and the Black Jewish youth she led, as just a few days

before the Symposium was published, Sybil resigned from her position as youth leader, alluding to racial tensions in her resignation letter.<sup>75</sup>

## Toward a New Ethic of Multi-Racial Jewish Dialogue

So what can we learn from these instances of “listening rhetoric in action”? In this chapter I analyzed two instances where white Jewish leaders who believed very deeply in the values of Civil Rights approached Black Jewish leaders in a Black Jewish congregation in an attempt to persuade them away from separatism and toward interaction with Hatzaad Harishon, and one transcript from the type of dialogue these white Jewish leaders valued dearly—where Black and white Jews both participated. While I don’t want to devalue the very important relationship-building work that such dialogues can and do have, I want to emphasize their limitations and offer some guidelines that might help both to clarify their goals and help bring such goals into fruition. Perhaps it goes without saying though it bears repeating, that as the youth point out, for material changes to take place more than simply dialogue needs to happen. Many white participants in Civil Rights, and many Jewish people among them, failed to acknowledge this need for such material changes, and this failure reflected the different ways that whites and non-whites experience the social impact of “colorblind cultural logics.”<sup>76</sup> Yet if dialogue is meant to achieve more than a reenactment and reification of status quo power relations, it must *move beyond* or at least begin to chip away at the (often colorblind) values that sustain such inequalities and address the discourse and material realities of white privilege. As Jensen points out, listening rhetoric works best when it creates a “scene where individuals may encounter difference on its own terms and thus *begin to unravel prevailing logics that promote and sustain identity-based violence.*”<sup>77</sup> So in order to move beyond the status quo participants must be willing to acknowledge that dialogue is only the first step in a process toward greater material change.

Of course there are at least two elements to such a process of successful listening rhetoric—one where individuals encounter difference *on its own terms*, which is more than simply encountering difference. Like all of the participants, Kaufman encounters difference in the Symposium. But instead of acknowledging it and letting it exist on its own terms, she narrates over it without allowing the difference she encounters to challenge the “prevailing logic” of “colorblindness” which sustains rather than stops identity-based violence she participates in. In other words, she listens, but she doesn’t “hear,” and consequently, the “listening” as Booth

pints out, becomes “useless” precisely because it *doesn't* change her rhetoric. Perhaps one of the most important things we can learn from this failure to hear is how we all, and those in positions with social and other privileges especially, must listen harder in the very moments when what we hear contradicts or disrupts the values that we hold most dear—in Kaufman's case—the desire for an idealized future where race didn't matter. The first step to enabling listening to change one's rhetoric is recognizing the difference between hearing the need for change and acknowledging the value in hearing a different interpretation of an event or experience, and engaging in behaviors, actions, or changes that help rectify material conditions. While it is extremely important to listen and to interact, the imbalance of power influences even these dialogic encounters, and those in power benefit more from such interactions than those who are not. To change that dynamic and begin to realize different power relations, participants must be open to encountering difference on its own terms, and acknowledging, as Rick did, their own participation in systems which perpetuate injustice and inequality. That recognition is a necessary though far from sufficient step in helping to create change, which helps to enact more just structural and material conditions. Though such changes begin with listening rhetoric, to be effective they must evolve into action.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002): 4. See also Jerald Podair, “The Ocean Hill- Brownsville Crisis: New York's *Antigone*” (paper presented to the History Department, Lawrence University, October 6, 2001). Available at <http://www.gothamcenter.org/festival/2001/confpapers/podair.pdf> (Accessed 20 November 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. See also Melissa F. Weiner, *Power Protest and the Public Schools: Jewish and African American Struggles in New York City* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2010): 170-174 and Jane Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict over Community Control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville (1967-1971)* (New York and London: Routledge Falmer, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Podair, “The Ocean Hill- Brownsville Crisis.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Melissa Weiner, *Power, Protest and the Public Schools*, 173.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Booth, Preface, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, xii.

<sup>9</sup> I use the term Black Jewish because not everyone identifying as Jewish was African American or would have identified as such. I capitalize the “B” in Black to distinguish these self-identified Jews from black Jews who have already converted

under *halacha* (Jewish law) or have been accepted by the recognized Jewish community for other reasons (i.e., Ethiopians were accepted as legitimate, but then forced to convert upon their entry to Israel in the 1980s). I use the term "recognized Jewish community" as an umbrella term that encompasses all mainstream Jews and the organizations affiliated with them. The term recognized is meant to be inclusive of Ashkenazi (Jews of Eastern European descent), Sephardi (Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent), and Mizrahi Jews (Jews of Eastern descent from Yemen, Iraq, Iran, India, etc), although most Jews in a U.S. context are descendents of Ashkenazim. The term recognized is meant to include all these religious traditions, even though in the U.S. and Israel "recognized Jewish culture" tends to be much more closely identified with Ashkenazi traditions. See also Aziza Khazzoom "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel" *American Sociological Review*, 68: (2003): 481-510 and Ella Shohat "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims" *Social Text* 19(1988): 21-35 for a discussion of the dominance of Ashkenazi hegemony.

<sup>10</sup> Kroll, "Arguing Differently," 37-60.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Kroll, "Arguing Differently," 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Ellie Bivens, Letter to "My Newest and Most valuable friend" 16 July 1964. *Hatzaad Harishon* Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY.

<sup>16</sup> *Hatzaad Harishon Newsletter February 1967*, "Hatzaad Harishon Youth News." Hatzaad Harishon Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY.

<sup>17</sup> See also Jacob Dorman. "I Saw You Disappear With My Own Eyes: Hidden Transcripts of New York Black Israelite Bricolage," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11 (2007): 61-83 for a discussion of Matthew's religious innovation; Janice W. Fernheimer, "Commandment Keepers of Harlem" *The Encyclopedia of African American Religious Culture*. Ed. Anthony B. Pinn. (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Publishing, 2009): 97-101.

<sup>18</sup> Note that according to James Landing, the New York Board of Rabbis was initially called the "New York Board of Jewish Ministers." See also James Landing, *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 206.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, quoted in Landing 207.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> "The Black Jews." *Newsweek* December 26, 1966. Hatzaad Harishon, Inc. Ethiopian

Hebrew Congregation Records, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, 264 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

<sup>26</sup> Yaakov Gladstone. Letter to Rabbi Wentworth Matthew, 14 June 1968. Hatzaad Harishon Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY. Yaakov Gladstone. Letter to Rabbi Wentworth Matthew, 25 June 1964. Hatzaad Harishon Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY.

<sup>27</sup> Leonard Benari. Minutes Committee on the Black Jews and Hatzaad Harishon 9 May 1968. 2. Hatzaad Harishon Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> For another detailed account, see Jacob S. Dorman, "Hatzaad Harishon: Integration, Black Power and Black Jews in New York, 1964-1972" (Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Stanford University, 1996), 76- 87.

<sup>30</sup> Yaakov Gladstone. Letter to Rabbi Wentworth Matthew, 14 June 1968. Hatzaad Harishon Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Yaakov Gladstone. Letter to Rabbi Wentworth Matthew 25 June 1968. Hatzaad Harishon Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup> Kroll, "Arguing Differently," 35.

<sup>38</sup> Sybil Kaplan, email to author, 13 March 2006. When I questioned Kaufman in an email exchange on March 13, 2006, she had no recollection of the letter to Dore, nor of any of the circumstances surrounding it.

<sup>39</sup> Kroll, "Arguing Differently," 40.

<sup>40</sup> Sybil Kaufman, "Letter to Dore" 24 October 1968. Hatzaad Harishon Collection. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 1, emphasis mine.

<sup>42</sup> Ellie Bivens notes that even at the formation of Hatzaad Harishon in 1964, Black Jewish congregations were often pitted against one another by their leaders. Ellie Bivens, Letter to "My Newest and Most valuable friend," 16 July 1964. Hatzaad Harishon Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY.

<sup>43</sup> Kroll, "Arguing Differently" 44.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Kaufman, "Letter to Dore."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>48</sup> Kroll, "Arguing Differently," 46.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Kaufman, "Letter to Dore".

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., mine.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>56</sup> "Transcription. Our Age Symposium." January 5, 1969. Personal Manuscript Archives of Sybil Kaplan's (formally Kaufman) Personal Manuscript Archives, shared with author. Pp1-45.

<sup>57</sup> "Black Jews and White: The Relevance of Color." *Our Age*, 10:10. Reform Movement of Jewish Youth. February 16, 1969. Pp 1-4.

<sup>58</sup> Full Transcript of Our Age Dialogue. Sybil Kaplan's Personal Archive, shared with the author.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>60</sup> This issue would become particularly pressing even for Hatzaad Harishon as Sybil Kaufman would resign from the position of youth advisor in February 1969, and white Jewish Yaakov Gladstone would step down from the position of director in May of 1970. For a discussion of the transfer of leadership in Civil Rights organizations from whites (often Jews) to Blacks, see also Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006) and Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Transcription. Our Age Symposium." January 5, 1969. Personal Manuscript Archives of Sybil Kaplan (formally Kaufman), shared with author. Pp 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 8-9, emphasis mine.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 40-41, emphasis mine.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 41, emphasis mine.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening*, 134.

<sup>74</sup> And Ratcliffe is careful to note that such "colorblindness" affects both whites and non-white, though it influences them differently. On the one hand, "for whites, colorblindness means denying the privileges often accorded whiteness in U.S. culture; it also means denying very real differences faced by whites and non-whites," whereas on the other hand, "for non-whites, it means being made to feel, once again that race is their 'problem' to 'solve' because they often seem to be the ones noticing that race is in play," 134.

<sup>75</sup> Sybil Kaufman, Resignation Letter February 18, 1969. Hatzaad Harishon, Inc. Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation Records, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

<sup>76</sup> Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening*, 134.

<sup>77</sup> Jensen, "Rhetorical Listening in Principle," 1.

*I would like to thank Sybil Kaplan, Yaakov Gladstone, and Rabbi Moshe Hailu Paris for sharing their materials, recollections, and enthusiasm.*