

The Negro and the Jew

The Confrontation: Black Power, Anti-Semitism and the Myth of Integration, by Max Geltman, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970. 239 pp. \$6.95.

A PARADOXICAL OUTGROWTH of the so-called civil rights movement, Mr. Geltman tells us, is "a hatred of Jews that baffles the liberal community as a whole and the Jewish community in particular." It is manifest in all Negro populated areas throughout the nation, but is especially evident in the great urban centers from Harlem to Watts where there is a swelling chorus of anger over an imagined Jewish conspiracy to exploit the blacks. For their part the Jews, says Mr. Geltman, have insisted that they have something special to teach the Negroes and have cherished the notion that the long record of Jewish suffering must mean something to a race which has also experienced contempt and persecution. This attitude, as James Baldwin admitted, has only "increased the Negro's rage."

But no matter how often or how angrily the Negro says, "Go away!" he is unable to shake off the Jewish involvement in the national race problem. It is as if, in Mr. Geltman's words, the Jews "as Jews, have a special expertise" in the matter and a special commission to usher in the golden age of color blindness. But many Jews, says the author, "acting out of a mistaken goodwill or an overweening sense of righteousness which they translate as 'social justice,' are only serving as intruders in the choking dust of black-white relations in America." Mr. Geltman cites the indignant protest of Harold Cruse, author of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*:

. . . The main job of researching and interpreting the American Negro has been taken over by the Jewish intelligentsia

to the extent where it is practically impossible for the Negro to deal with one Anglo-Saxon majority in this country unless he first comes to the Jews to get his instructions.

Max Geltman calls for a disengagement. It is time, he thinks, that Jews cease to volunteer their advice and their expertise—even where they have it—to those who, right now, would rather try to make it on their own. What is necessary, he finds,

is a separation of the Jewish intellectuals, with their special periodicals and organizations, from Negro attempts at self-assertion. There are enough Negro psychologists, writers, critics, artists, activists, moderates, conservatives, and ordinary hard-working people to lead the way to the relative freedom that most of us enjoy in this country.

The liberals, against whom so much resentment is being directed in almost all segments of the old civil rights movement and particularly by the newer leaders, have perhaps never understood the dignity of the Negro. Fundamentally, as Max Geltman writes, "the problem of the Negro is one for the Negro to solve. If he resents taking responsibility for his own plight, he must be reminded that only he can make his life what he wants it to be." The "emancipation" of any minority is ultimately a problem in "auto-emancipation." One of the many gigantic flaws in the Supreme Court decision of 1954 was the assumption that contiguity with white pupils in classrooms would improve the quality of the Negro child's education. What the court failed to recognize is that the aspirations of the different groups that constitute the total American community are not all the same. All that decency demands is that opportunity to pursue his aspirations should not be denied to the Negro; but the ultimate triumph over adversity and the city slums is up to him.

Mr. Geltman points out that it is just this "equality of differences" that so many Jew-

ish liberals have ignored. They have proclaimed an identity of suffering with the Negro that has served to turn the black man's anger into revulsion. But "if the Negro wants to achieve *his* dreams *his* way," demands Geltman, "who are we to deny him?"

It will not do to make believe that he has achieved or desires to achieve the same things that most Jewish intellectuals desire for their children. It is possible, of course, that a special view of heaven requires a special vision. If the Negro thinks his path blocked by obstacles put in his way, then others should not clutter up his landscape.

This is the point, Geltman insists, that Jewish liberals are unable to understand.

They will protest, argue, cite statistics, defend themselves, but they will never understand. The reason is their optimistic philosophy; they are the last remaining disciples of world brotherhood, internationalism, and color-blindness in a world riven by racism, nationalism, tribalism, ambition, greed and power. They believe these iron passions can be obliterated with the magic word, education.

The presence of black revolutionaries on the campuses and in the streets is undoubtedly due in some part to disillusion with the myth that forced integration would automatically create utopia for the Negro. Thus the liberals' anticipation of instant acceptance and instant improvement is one cause of the urban riots.

It is Max Geltman's belief that the academic sociologists "have done more to poison group relations in the United States than have all the bigots of North and South." He suggests—perhaps ironically but with pungent validity—that it would be desirable if the sociologists refrained from expressing opinions on any but the most innocuous of subjects. But the sociologists give no sign of having acquired discretion. They are now telling us about the

value of reverse discrimination. Formerly, they told us that the rioting, arson and looting was the vengeance taken by "underprivileged youths" against the society that had kept them in poverty and degradation, but the fact, borne out repeatedly by the evidence, is that the tendency toward black militancy, separatism, rioting and revolutionary violence is much more pronounced among the literate and educated members of the black community than among the ignorant and "underprivileged."

Politicians are planting the seeds of future trouble by accepting the *dicta* of sociologists as if they were inspired and somehow infallible, which of course they are not. The politicians, lacking for the most part any real experience of slum life, allow themselves to be persuaded that a bribe here, a promise there, a minipark, a storefront "City Hall," or orders to the police to make no more arrests, will help to assure civic peace. Such policies, however, are much more calculated to produce incidents like the ambuscade in Plainfield, New Jersey, in the summer of 1967, where armed rioters so demoralized the city administration that it ultimately defaulted in its sworn duty to preserve the public order and safety. It surrendered because of a misguided application of the principle of civil liberty—much the same misapplication as that which hastened the death of liberty in Weimar Germany.

The cult of violence grows, and its growth is often encouraged by certain liberal publications (so-called), by some rich foundations, by certain women of vast wealth and other devotees of "radical chic." The Jewish shopkeepers of Harlem, Watts and elsewhere, however, encamped as it were in enemy territory, know that they have everything to lose in a violent confrontation. Many of these businessmen, says Geltman,

have lived to see their daughters, educated to be schoolteachers, weep as demagogues take over classrooms to teach children false history. Adding bitterness to their tears is the fact that until the

day before yesterday they had been paid-up members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. The fathers understand that the daughters betrayed themselves.

Geltman believes it soon will be necessary for Jewish merchants to depart from the ghettos; but experienced businessmen, he thinks, should have little difficulty in establishing themselves elsewhere, thus making room for the growth of local Negro business enterprises. The transition should be made as painless and as mutually advantageous as possible. Negro-controlled banks and the already well-established Negro business concerns, by helping to underwrite the first years of experiment, can do far more to help the Negro community obtain what it needs than will freedom rides, poverty marches, and sit-in demonstrations. Obviously, though, the Negro cannot have it both ways. He cannot demand the business and then refuse to operate it unless the government or some other agency agrees to subsidize it, or perhaps just because he considers it beneath him to become, as one man put it, "a goddam storekeeper." Perhaps, says Geltman, it may be necessary at first to have the businesses conducted by women; on the other hand maybe some of the millions of now missing Negro men between the ages of thirty and forty will return to their families when a new status as merchants has been opened to them. In any event a hundred Negro-owned businesses can do more to improve "intergroup relations" than a hundred interracial and interfaith gatherings conducted in an atmosphere of desperation.

Until now Jews have been in the forefront of the N.A.A.C.P., the Urban League, and the Congress of Racial Equality; they have been among the most ardent participants in academic symposia on what to do about "the Negro problem." Jewish intellectuals have humiliated themselves over and over in apologies for their education, affluence and liberalism. Now, Mr. Geltman asserts, is the time for a complete

withdrawal from Negro affairs. The Negro wants to go it alone, and should be allowed to do so. For his own sake the Jew must dissociate himself from Negro concerns at every level, except that of personal friendship, which is a far better basis for mutual understanding than all the pious sentiment about a common identification as minority groups. The truth is, as Geltman asserts, that to the Jewish liberal the Negro is not a person so much as a social abstraction. To the liberal, as to the race bigot, Negroes not only look alike, *they are alike*. For all his compassion for the Negro the liberal has never gone out of his way to live with him, to work with him, to play with him—in a word to know him. As one Negro put it, the Northern white liberal has less understanding of black persons than the Southern segregationist. For in the South at least, no matter how grievously the Negro may have been repressed or discriminated against, his flesh-and-blood reality has never been denied.

Reviewed by TOMMY W. ROGERS

"The Intolerable Wrestle"

A Walk to the River, by William Hoffman, Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1970. 336 pp. \$5.95.

WILLIAM HOFFMAN is one of the writers indicted in Floyd C. Watkins' *The Death of Art: Black and White in the Recent Southern Novel* (University of Georgia Press, 1970). Professor Watkins' thesis, simple to argue, is that the fictions of Hoffman, Carson McCullers, Elizabeth Spencer, Harper Lee, Jesse Hill Ford, Peter S. Feibleman, and others, including even William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren in some of their late work, fail both on the side of truth and on the side of art in their