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Black Viewpoints on the Mid-East Conflict

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Unfortunately, but by birth, I come from the ranks of those who had known and identified with some level of oppression in the world. By choice I continue to identify with what would be called in biblical terms the least of these my brethren.

Perhaps with the above in mind, Ambassador Andrew Young, anticipating his term as president of the Security Council, held discussions with the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) United Nations observer. Following the unauthorized meeting, Young was reprimanded and later submitted his resignation as ambassador to the United Nations. Because his resignation was associated with Jewish protest over his United Nations activities, increased tension developed between members of the Black and Jewish communities. Young's resignation was seen as the latest of a series of actions which tended to strain relations between the two traditional allies. Prior to the United Nations episode, disenchantment had already developed in the Black community over the failure of Jewish Americans to support the affirmative action efforts of civil rights organizations, and as a result of the friendly ties which appeared to have been developing between Israel and the white minority government of South Africa. Since the increased hostilities came after years of Black-Jewish cooperation in the common struggle against oppression, there arose concern among leaders of both communities. Ambassador Young, perhaps fearing what a split between Blacks and Jews

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would mean, not only for the two minorities but for the nation as well, appealed for calm in both camps. The Ambassador was mindful of the fact that his resignation had created an incident which could split the Democratic Party coalition, and thus would have serious consequences for both groups.² President Carter expressed a similar concern. Being aware of the need to safeguard national unity in a multi-ethnic nation, and perhaps realizing the possible impact of the split in the coalition upon his re-election campaign, President Carter observed:

Black Americans and Jewish Americans have worked side by side for generations in the service of human rights, social justice and the general welfare. Both groups have a particular call on the conscience of each other and on the conscience of us all. Both groups have suffered too much pain, too much persecution, too much bigotry, to compound that suffering in any way.

History has indicated a record of Black-Jewish cooperation. During the decade of the 1960's Jewish Americans responded to the civil rights struggle in larger numbers than did other non-Black Americans. They contributed both their money and personal services. Civil rights organizations reciprocated by lending their influence to Jewish foreign policy causes. Blacks identified both with Jewish objectives in the Middle East, and their concern over the persecution of their kinsmen in the Soviet Union. In his assessment of Black-Jewish relations, Carl Gershman observed that both groups had a real stake in maintaining a cooperative relationship, noting that Blacks were conscious of the need for Jewish support, especially in the financial area, and likewise, Jewish Americans realized the importance of Black support in the drive to secure their foreign policy objectives. Gershman perceived Blacks as retaining "important moral authority" that could be exercised on behalf of Israel at a time when the Jewish state was considered to be a victim of a world-wide campaign of hatred. He also considered the alliance with Blacks as being important to the Jewish strategy of exercising influence within American society through a web of relationships.⁴

This paper will analyse Black concern with the Middle East conflict both prior to and after the resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young.

BLACK AMERICANS AND ISRAEL

In 1970 more than a hundred well-known Black Americans, representing a broad cross-section, pledged support for Israel in a full page advertisement

2 Robert E. Johnson, "Andy Young Talks About things He Couldn't Talk About Before Now," *Jet*, Sept. 13, 1979, p. 54.

3 *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, Aug. 21, 1979.

4 Carl Gershman, "Blacks and Jews," *Midstream*, Feb. 1976, p. 15.

in the *New York Times*.⁵ Signatories of the appeal based their action on concern for the preservation of democracy and social justice which they associated with the Jewish state. The advertisement praised the political freedom found in Israel, contrasted with dictatorial one-party rule in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. The signatories did, however, express concern over the plight of impoverished Arabs, especially those who had been displaced by the three Arab-Israeli wars. The Black Americans urged the United States to exert itself on behalf of peace in the area, and further warned of a growing Russian influence in the Middle East if the United States did not act decisively.

A similar appeal was made in 1973 by more than seventy-five Black trade unionists, who applauded the democratic spirit which prevailed in Israel. The labour leaders recalled the close linkage which had existed between Black and Jewish Americans in past years, noting that "no minority is safe if any minority is threatened."⁶

Two years later, under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph, the retired leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Bayard Rustin, the director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Black Americans to Support Israel Committee (BASIC) was organized. Well-known educators, entertainers, businessmen and trade unionists joined civil rights and political leaders in pledging support for Israel. BASIC noted that in "the fight against discrimination Black Americans and American Jews have shared profound and enduring common interests that far transcend any differences between us."⁷ It pledged support for Palestinian self-determination but not "at the expense of the rights of Jews to independence and statehood and not at the command of economic blackmailers or of terrorists who would force their own 'solution' at the point of a gun." The PLO was envisioned as an unelected body representing only its own members, who, like all terrorist groups, had turned "their unbridled violence" against anyone who dared to get in their way, including fellow-Palestinians. BASIC also condemned the Arab oil policies, noting the impact they had upon Black Americans and Africans.⁸

Like other Black Americans, Black legislators frequently came to the aid of Israel. In 1975, ten of the seventeen members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) wrote a letter which warned against the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations. They concluded that the expulsion of Israel would

5 "Appeal by Black Americans for United States Support to Israel," *New York Times*, June 28, 1970.

6 "An Appeal from Black Trade Unionists: Support Israel," *New York Times*, Oct. 23, 1973.

7 "Black Americans to Support Israel Committee," *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 1975.

8 *Ibui*.

probably cause the United States and many other nations to reassess the basis for their membership in the United Nations, and such a reassessment could lead to a reduction of the American financial commitment, which would cause Africa and the rest of the Third World to suffer.⁹ A year later, the CBC called for new initiatives in the Middle East peace efforts. It urged that these new efforts be based upon mutual recognition of Israeli and Palestinian rights. It supported continued American guarantees of the existence of Israel, and suggested that such aid not be used as a "vehicle to manipulate or control the foreign policy of Israel." The CBC also made a plea for a homeland for displaced Palestinians, but it did not propose a specific approach. It did suggest, however, that the Palestinians give up the idea of replacing Israel with a secular state in the area.¹⁰

In addition to their support for Jewish causes in the Middle East, Black Americans also sought to aid Jewish groups in promoting a more liberal Soviet attitude toward Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. Typical of such support was a resolution adopted by the 1973 annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), which called upon the United States government to use its influence to relieve the persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union.¹¹

While many Black Americans have supported the Jewish cause, there have been those who have opposed it. In 1970 the Committee of Black Americans for the Truth About the Support of the Zionist Government of Israel placed an appeal in the *New York Times* which proclaimed the solidarity of Black Americans with "Palestinian brothers and sisters who like us are struggling for self-determination and an end to racist oppression."¹² Israel was compared with Rhodesia and South Africa as privileged white settler states that came into existence by displacing indigenous peoples. The signatories sought to make clear that they were not anti-Jewish, but instead, anti-Zionist.

On the organizational level, the Black Muslims, Black Panthers and Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were among the most vocal spokesmen for the anti-Zionist cause. In June, 1967 the SNCC incurred the wrath of Jewish organizations as a result of a newsletter which it issued, advising Afro-Americans to strengthen their ties with the Third World, and

9 Text of Letter to the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations of All Black African Countries, Sept. 19, 1975.

10 "Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Agenda, 94th Congress, 2nd Session," Reprint of *Congressional Record*, April 14, 1976.

11 NAACP, *Resolutions of 64th Annual Convention*, 1973, Sec. 2. Art. IX.

12 "An Appeal by Black Americans for the Truth About the Middle East," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1970.

to oppose Zionism which it regarded as oppressive. In a similar manner, Stokely Carmichael, a former leader of SNCC, warned of the evils of Zionism and called upon Blacks to pledge themselves to destroy evidences of it, both in the Middle East and the ghettos of the United States.¹³ While many Jewish Americans were enraged over the SNCC's attitude, Harry Fleischmann, race relations coordinator for the American Jewish Committee, sought to calm the storm by suggesting that the SNCC and Black separatists were not representative of the Black community.¹⁴

Huey Newton, Minister of Defence of the Black Panthers, felt that the plight of the Palestinians was well understood in the Black community since the latter has suffered persecution and thus finds it easy to identify with the suffering of others. In his Palestinian solution, Newton appeared to have built in the acceptance of Israel. He noted:

We have respect for all people, and we have respect for the right of any people to exist. So we want the Jewish people and the Palestinian people to live in harmony together. We support the Palestinians' just struggle for liberation one hundred percent. We will go on doing this, and we would like for all of the progressive people of the world to join in our ranks in order to make a world in which all people can live.

Malcolm X also was critical of the role played by the United States in subsidizing Israel. He saw European and American Christians as aiding the establishment of Israel in order to achieve economic gains in the Middle East.¹⁶ He also noted the effect of American support for Israel on the Black community: "In America the Jews sap the very life-blood of the so-called Negroes to maintain the State of Israel, its armies and its continued aggression against brothers in the East."¹⁷

Historically, the Black advocates of Jewish causes have cited the following reasons for their support: (1) The concern of Blacks with the prevention of the persecution of any minority; (2) The democratic nature of Israeli society; (3) The Jewish support for the civil rights efforts of Blacks in the United States, and (4) Jewish aid in the development of Africa. The pro-Palestinian Blacks challenged most of these contentions. While they were willing to acknowledge that Black Americans should express concern over the persecution of minorities throughout the world, they denied that the

13 Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 142.

14 Harry Fleischman, "Negro Anti-Semitism and the White Backlash," *Pioneer Woman*, Feb.-March 1968).

15 Fran/. Schurmann, ed., *To Die For the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 196.

16 C. F. ric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 177.

17 *Ibid.*

Israelis were the oppressed in the Middle East. Instead, they insisted that the Palestinians, because of their oppression by the State of Israel were more deserving of Black support. Likewise, Israel's claim of being a democratic state was challenged. Rather, it was perceived as a racist society which consistently pursues a policy of discrimination against darker Jews and Arabs. In international affairs, the Israeli attitude towards South Africa was seen as being "too cozy." With regard to the latter, Jewish groups insisted that the Israeli relationship with South Africa did not denote support of its apartheid regime, and they sought to justify the Israeli position by citing the hypocritical attitudes which many Black African countries show towards the South African regime, while simultaneously criticizing Israel.

While initially few were willing to question the Jewish commitment to civil rights, the sincerity of these efforts was beginning to be doubted by the last half of the decade. Not only were hostile relations developing as a result of Jewish businesses in Black communities, but the quota system — implied in affirmative action programmes — appeared to have placed the old Black-Jewish alliance in jeopardy. The opposing positions taken in the *DeFunis*, *Bakke* and *Weber* cases tended to drive a wedge between the two groups.

Thus it was that by the time of Ambassador Young's resignation, the tide had already begun to change in the Palestinians' favour. The popularity of the Third World theme among Blacks, as well as the increase in Muslim conversion, tended to help the Palestinians. Simultaneously, the Jews tended to hurt their cause by the anti-affirmative action stance which they were taking, by the apparent entrenched Israeli position with regard to occupied Arab land, and by Israel's seemingly friendly attitude towards South Africa. This was the scene at the time of the resignation of Ambassador Young.

MOVING TOWARDS THE PLO

Following the resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young, Black Americans reacted with bitterness toward both the Carter administration and Jewish Americans. As noted earlier, both Ambassador Young and President Carter issued statements designed to calm the storm. Likewise, both civil rights and Jewish organizations recommended an immediate dialogue between the two minorities. The American Jewish Congress (AJC), in responding favourably to a suggestion for dialogue which was made by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), noted that it would be tragic if the resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young was allowed to create "an unbridgeable gulf" between Blacks and Jews. A leader of the AJC insisted that the resignation of Young was not related to his race, but instead had resulted from his "violation of the policy of the United States

government and his later misrepresentation of his action."¹⁸

Later the leaders of the SCLC followed the precedent of Ambassador Young and held talks with the PLO representative. The discussion, and the remarks made by the leader of the SCLC after the talks, led the president of the American Jewish Congress to express fears that the historic alliance was being undermined by such statements. He reaffirmed, however, the support of the AJC for racial equality and social justice, and pledged to continue to cooperate with Black leaders who sought similar goals, and who had rejected anti-Semitism and bigotry.¹⁹ At the same time the Israeli ambassador was suggesting that foreign policy be left to the experts. This suggestion, perhaps more than the resignation itself, enraged leaders of major Black organizations.

Reacting to the circumstances which had led to the resignation of Ambassador Young, and the criticisms of the new foreign policy role of Black civil rights organizations, approximately 230 leaders and representatives of civil rights and other major Black organizations convened in New York to consider strategy. The participants at that conference defended the right of the SCLC to speak out on foreign policy issues, and deplored the double standards which had been used in judging Ambassador Young, whom they considered to have been performing his duty in preparation for assuming the presidency of the Security Council. The leadership group felt that it was Young's prerogative, in the above role, to meet with all parties involved in the pending United Nations debate on the Middle East.²⁰

In addition to the collective response, individual organizations began to express their views with regard to the foreign affairs episode. TransAfrica, the Black American Lobby for Africa and the Caribbean, seeing a linkage between African policies and those pursued with regard to the Middle East, wrote to the Carter administration to express disappointment over the resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young. The letter deplored the fact that the FLO had engaged in acts of terrorism, but also cited Israeli acts of violence. It noted that Israeli actions of the last decade had eroded "the basis of respect and acceptance" in the Black community. The Israeli intransigence with regard to occupied Arab land, and Israeli acts of violence in Lebanon were cited as causes of Israel's lost prestige among Black Americans.

18 American Jewish Congress, "American Jewish Congress Responds to SCLC in Its Call for New Black-Jewish Dialogue Following Resignation of Ambassador Young," Press Release, Aug. 16, 1979.

19 American Jewish Congress, "Comments of Howard M. Squadron following the Resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young," Press Release, Aug. 24, 1979.

20 See "Statement by NAACP National Board of Directors in the Aftermath of Resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young," Press Release, Sept. 10, 1979.

As previously noted, the SCLC reacted initially by holding talks with Zahdi Labib Tarzi, the PLO observer to the United Nations. The NAACP, perhaps seeking to prevent a further widening of the gap between the Black and Jewish communities, reacted more cautiously. The Association's Board of Directors adopted a resolution which condemned violence regardless of the source, and suggested that those involved directly in the conflict begin direct contacts in order to facilitate the negotiation of a Middle East settlement. The Association pledged itself to continue to identify with the Middle East policy of the American government in the promotion of the interest of the nation and its people, but it urged the United States not to proscribe or limit the participation of any "bona fide" Middle East entity in the pursuit of peace. The Association further called on the Carter administration to reconsider its policy of ignoring the PLO, and expressed support for self-determination and a homeland for the Palestinian people, while simultaneously urging the United States to remain true to its commitment to the permanent existence of Israel within safe and secure borders. With regard to Black-Jewish relations, the Association noted its concern over differences which had arisen between the two minorities following the resignation of Ambassador Young, and urged that the incident not be permitted to be used as a "vehicle for the increase of tension."²¹

The Reverend Joseph Lowery and Representative Walter Fauntroy, both perceiving themselves as moral ambassadors, undertook a study tour of the Middle East. The ten-man SCLC team anticipated conferring both with leaders of the Palestinians and Israelis. However, Premier Menahem Begin refused to see the delegation and discouraged other governmental leaders from doing so. The Israeli government did not consider it wise to confer with a delegation which it perceived as having granted legitimacy to violence by consulting with leaders of the PLO. The visiting SCLC leaders did visit Lebanon, however, and while there were escorted to refugee camps which had been destroyed by Israel as a means of retaliating against PLO guerrillas. The high point of the visit, however, was the conference with Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the PLO, which was followed by the singing of the traditional civil rights hymn, "We Shall Overcome." Reverend Lowery also used the occasion to announce his intention of organizing a series of seminars on the Middle East after his return to the United States. Chairman Arafat was invited to address the opening meeting in New York. While the SCLC appeared to have been pro-Palestinian in orientation, it did announce support for the existence of Israel as a Jewish homeland, and explained that during its meeting with PLO officials it had sought to persuade them to give up the policy of violence.

²¹ *ibid.*

Shortly after the return of the SCLC's team to the United States, Reverend Jesse Jackson, the head of Operation PUSH, led a team of seventeen on a similar Middle East study mission. Israel was the first stop on the tour, but prior to the visit, the Israeli government had announced its refusal to grant the civil rights leader an audience. This snubbing of Jackson led to criticisms both in Israel and in the Black community. Ambassador Young contrasted this discourtesy with the official acceptance by Israel of Prime Minister Vorster of South Africa.²² Upon Jackson's arrival in Israel, he met with opposition leader Shimon Peres and Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem. In explaining the reason for having made the mission to the Middle East, Jackson observed that he represented those "who would be the first to die, or the first ones to go cold in the winter" if the present Middle East policies led to a war or the reduction of the Arab flow of oil to the United States.²³ During his visit to the Arab capitals, Reverend Jackson was given a hero's welcome. He toured refugee camps and villages and used the occasion to criticize the United States for its uneven policy of spending more money on Israel than on the Palestinian refugees. In his talks with leaders of the PLO, he urged a reassessment of their hard line policies, and called for the use of psychological warfare rather than guerrilla tactics. Jackson attempted to persuade Arafat to recognize Israel's right to exist, while simultaneously continuing the effort to achieve self-determination and a homeland. The civil rights leader sought to encourage peaceful coexistence in the Middle East.²⁴

Why did Reverend Jackson go to the Middle East? According to the civil rights leader, he went because "peace is worth pursuing." He did not see the visit as endorsing violence, as some had maintained. He noted: "PLO recognition is not an endorsement of terrorism anymore than the recognition of Israel's right to exist is an endorsement of bomb raids."²⁵ He saw his visit as possibly being helpful if it brought an end to the United States' "no talk" policy- Jackson observed that: "A 'no talk' policy is an international absurdity in a civilized society because the only alternative to talking is continued war, bloodshed and suffering on both sides, and world economic and political instability."²⁶

Jackson's rejection of the "no talk" policy was endorsed by Carl Rowan, a syndicated columnist, and a former director of the United States Infor-

22 "Young Counsels Blacks to Stick by the President," *Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 1979.

23 "Jackson! Arafat! ", *Newsweek*, Oct. 8, 1979. p. 50.

24 "Jackson Urges PLO to Reassess and Abandon Guerrilla Warfare," *New York Times News Service, Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, Sept. 29, 1979.

25 Jesse L. Jackson, "Why I Meet with Yasir Arafat," *Daytona Beach Times*, Oct. 11, 1979.

26 *Ibid.*

mation Agency. He noted that although Israel had the freedom to continue to insist that it would never negotiate with the PLO, it would not be in the best interest of the United States to adopt the same approach. Rowan warned that such a policy would close the door to the peace process, endanger American oil supplies, and thus increase the risk of war in the area.

Although the missions led by Lowery and Jackson were seen by some as publicity stunts undertaken to restore the declining status of once prestigious civil rights organizations, or for the glorification of the individual leader, they were perceived by others as opening doors to a new era in the politics of the Middle East — one in which the PLO would be taken more seriously in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict. The *Washington Post* observed that these study missions brought to the Middle East "an emotional identification with the Palestinians, whom they perceived as the injured party, or the more injured party, and at the same time a high moral profile and a sense of mission." The *Post* questioned, however, whether it was possible for these teams to identify openly with one side and still remain in a position to mediate. It felt that because of the non-traditional approach used by the civil rights leaders, something good could conceivably result from the missions, however.²⁸ Mary McGrory of the *Washington Star* envisioned Reverend Lowery as possibly another Martin Luther King, Jr., who could emerge as an effective spokesperson for the Palestinian cause.²⁹

The missions were not seen as possessing a highly moral purpose by Max Lerner of the *Los Angeles Times*. He questioned why Black Americans should feel obligated to embrace Young's approach as their own, or feel that the interest of the PLO was the same as theirs or the Blacks whom they professed to lead.³⁰ Likewise, the *New York Times* saw the suddenness and lack of preparation involved in the Lowery and Jackson missions as a demonstration that a Middle East solution was not their major concern.³¹

Another critic of the pro-Palestinian approach to the Middle East was Julius Lester, a former member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. He questioned the arrogance of some Blacks in lecturing to Jewish-Americans concerning their lack of sensitivity in responding to

27 Carl T. Rowan, "Young's Blackness Not An Issue: PLO Is," *Daytona Beach Evening News*, Aug. 19, 1979.

28 *Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 1979.

29 Mary McGrory, "Palestinians May Have a New Martin Luther King Speaking for Them," *Washington Star*, Sept. 24, 1979.

30 *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, Aug. 29, 1979.

31 *New York Times*, Oct. 16, 1979.

problems which are of interest to Black Americans. He reminded Blacks that "the lack of Black sensitivity on matters of deep and abiding concern to Jews has wounded Jews as much as Jewish opposition to affirmative action has wounded us."³² He perceived Black leadership as being "morally barren," recalling that it was not quick to respond to the murder of the eleven members of the Israeli Olympic team and similar atrocities.

Following Jackson's return to the United States, attempts were made by leaders of some of the Black civil rights organizations to downgrade the earlier missions to the Middle East. Seven Blacks led by William Pollard, director of the civil rights department of the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), undertook a visit to Israel, in response to an invitation extended by the Histadrut, the Israeli labour federation. Unlike the earlier missions, efforts were not made to consult with Palestinian leaders. According to Pollard, they had not received an invitation from the PLO, and if they had, they would not have accepted it.³³ The members of the delegation met with Prime Minister Menahem Begin and assured him of their support for Israel, but they made clear their opposition to such actions as the recent building of Israeli settlements on occupied Arab land. Accompanying Pollard were representatives of the NAACP, National Urban League and the A. Philip Randolph Institute. Bayard Rustin, executive director of the latter, and a long-time supporter of Israel, compared the PLO with the Ku Klux Klan.³⁴ Earlier, Rustin had expressed displeasure with President Carter's attempt to draw a parallel between the Palestinian efforts and those of the civil rights movement. In a letter to the President, he suggested that while "the civil rights movement fought for reforms which would strengthen and protect the rights of all Americans, the PLO supports a programme which denies the just rights of Israel and its citizens." He perceived the civil rights movement as a "massive moral revolution" while seeing the PLO as devoting its efforts towards the achievement of a "revolution against basic morality."³⁵

The new fraternization of civil rights organizations with the PLO also led Benjamin Hooks of the NAACP to warn against this new and unusual flirtation. He questioned the effectiveness of the Middle East missions, which he perceived as having a greater media effect than impact on the making of foreign policy. In order to bring about an effective change of policy, Hooks suggested a greater effort be directed at influencing the attitudes at the

32 *Village Voice*, Sept. 10, 1979.

33 "PLO is Like the Klan, Black Rights Leader Says," *Miami Herald*, Oct. 16, 1979.

34 *Ibid.*

35 "PLO Against Basic Morality," Press Release of Black-Jewish Information Center, Aug. 3, 1979.

White House and the State Department.³⁶

Likewise, Vernon Jordan of the National Urban League, in his appearance before the National Conference of Catholic Charities, warned that it was time to stop "providing joy to the cross burners and bomb throwers," and insisted that efforts be made to strengthen "the traditional fruitful alliance between the Black community and the Jewish community."³⁷ Jordan's criticism of leaders of Black organizations provoked his critics to accuse the National Urban League of being too fearful of losing Jewish financial support to "take a stand." Reverend George Lawrence, speaking for the Progressive National Baptist Convention referred to Jordan as being too timid to take a stand independent of the Jewish community.³⁸ Reverend Jesse Jackson responded to the charges of Jordan by noting that disagreement among the various organizations was not serious enough to produce disaster. He observed that the movement was "resilient enough to differ without disintegration."³⁹ Reverend Walter Fauntroy, Chairman of the SCLC also sought to calm the storm. While defending his earlier position with regard to the PLO, he criticized it for not accepting the peace accord offered by the SCLC, and on that basis deferred the invitation originally extended to Arafat to speak in the United States.⁴⁰

Carl Rowan, the influential syndicated columnist, deplored the effort of the media to divide Blacks into warring camps ("moderates" versus "extremists"), and to create Black leaders who were not respected as leaders by the Black community. Rowan, while suggesting that Black Americans do have a legitimate reason to be concerned about the situation in the Middle East, noted that "the Black role cannot be partisan advocacy for any party to the complex and tragic dispute."⁴¹

A similar warning was given earlier by Dr. Alvin Poussaint, a Harvard University psychiatrist, and a frequent writer for *Ebony*. He advised Blacks not to rush "to the aid of the Arabs without some moral perspective, some reflection on long run intentions." He observed that "we are in a position of being used by the Carter administration in a shift of policy regarding Israel. By the Arabs to gain our support with nothing to show for it. And by Israel for continued support."⁴²

36 "Moderate Blacks Attempting Truce with Jews on PLO," New York Times News Service, *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, Oct. 12, 1979.

37 "Civil Rights Leaders Split on PLO Issue," *Daytona Beach Evening News*, Oct. 16, 1979.

38 "Sharp Words Widen Rift in Black Ranks," *Washington Post*, Oct. 16, 1979.

39 "Civil Rights Leaders Split on PLO Issue," *Daytona Beach Evening News*, Oct. 16, 1979.

40 "Fauntroy Defends His PLO Moves," *Washington Post*, Oct. 16, 1979.

41 Carl T. Rowan, "Blacks Should Be Neutral on Mideast," *Daytona Beach Evening News*, Oct. 19, 1979.

42 Paul Delaney, "Blacks Show New Interest in Influencing Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, Aug. 26, 1979.

Andy Young, whose resignation precipitated the Black reappraisal of their approach to the Middle East, sought to sum up the feeling of Blacks. He advised that "Black leaders remain steadfast in their support of Israel's survival and their concern for its security. But that backing does not exclude their being concerned about justice for Palestinians."⁴³

In the meantime, the Black community was displaying an air of uncertainty with regard to issues involving the Middle East. A survey taken by the Gallup organization shortly after the resignation of Ambassador Young revealed that 27 percent considered the PLO mainly a civil rights organization while 16 percent viewed it as a terrorist group. The largest percentage 57 percent gave no opinion as to how they perceived it. With regard to the question of their sympathy in the conflict, 28 percent identified themselves with Israel, 15 percent favoured the Arabs, 22 percent indicated neither and 37 percent expressed no opinion.⁴⁴

The search for peace in the Middle East, generally, was believed to have been of little concern to Black Americans. As alluded to earlier, it was suggested that perhaps Black civil rights organizations should leave such matters as foreign policy to the experts. The idea should be rejected. Black Americans, historically, have not restricted their foreign policy interest to Africa, but, because they are affected by the same issues which affect other Americans, they react similarly. Matters of war and peace, and issues of prosperity and recession generally affect Blacks more negatively than other Americans. Blacks paid dearly in the Vietnamese conflict, as they had done in all previous military encounters. A possible war in the Middle East, a cut-off of Arab oil, the rejection of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty — all will affect the well-being of Black Americans. Because they are affected, Black Americans — although not as many as desired — have reflected an interest in American foreign policy, and shown an historic interest in the Middle East.

43 "Black-Jewish Tension Called Family Affair," *Miami Herald*, Oct. 16, 1979.

44 *Newsweek*, Sept. 3, 1979.