

## **A Personal Meditation on Black-Jewish Relations**

**A Talk Delivered at a joint program of Hendrix College and the University of Central Arkansas,  
sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Arkansas**

**By Charney Vladeck Bromberg**

I was raised in a household where stories about the South and civil rights were part of the family lore. I was somewhere between thirteen and fourteen when the Little Rock school integration crisis happened, and later in that school year, when Minnijean Brown, one of the nine black students who so bravely integrated Central High was expelled, there was a rally in her support in Washington DC. I went, and I was lucky enough to ride in a school bus in which Minnijean led everyone in gospel and freedom songs. So, while I never put foot in Arkansas until yesterday, that experience, fifty years ago, rocked me to my core.

By the early 1960's, the civil rights movement was hitting home. I was growing up in Westchester County, New York - and in many of the most well-to-do villages and towns, as in so many places across America, Jews as well as blacks, could not buy homes because of restrictive covenants that were part of the housing title process. So, when I and two of my high school classmates decided to organize a youth group to help support the first of us who went South - a young woman who became the associate producer of *Eyes on the Prize* - we also undertook a campaign of passing out and collecting fair housing pledges in our own community.

I followed my friends to Mississippi at the end of the famous "Freedom Summer" in 1964. It was an election year, and I had started a paid job working on voter registration earlier in the year. My best friend, who was assigned to Canton, Mississippi, brought several people from the community to our home town during the summer for a little R&R, and, again, I was hooked by force of their personalities and passion. To this day, some of them are life-long friends - and my wife, son and his fiancee will travel tomorrow with me to visit with them.

My time in Mississippi - more than a year stretched over two and half years - was, needless to say, the most intense of my life. My first night in the state, I slept in the freedom house in McComb, next to the plywood repair of the wall blown out by a bomb planted just two nights before. Settling in Canton, I stayed in the home of my dear friend's father and mother - he, a legendary figure in Mississippi who would take no truck from anyone. By the way, my friends' extended family includes the African American astronaut who was killed in the Challenger space shuttle tragedy, an NBA superstar, two judges and the chair of the county Democratic Party, among other high achievers.

My first months were a process of learning; you don't call the police when you have been shot at - particularly because of the high probability that it was the police who shot at you. If there was another car on the road, either coming or going, as you approached the road or driveway to someone you had an appointment to see, you did not turn in. People's homes get shot into or burned, if you were careless; people lost their jobs, or worse.

In that first autumn and winter, we focused on registering black farmers for the local ASCS elections - the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service boards - which determined how much land a farmer could plant in cotton. In Madison County, Mississippi, black farmers were allocated roughly 10% of what their white peers were allocated. Because black farmers outnumbered white farmers by three to one, we were sure of victory, until the Department of Agriculture ruled that there must be as many "minority"

candidates as the proportion of minority farmers in the county, designating the blacks as the “minority.” Even the federal government played a very problematic game.

In the summer of 1965, I was asked to drive the blue Ford Fairlane station wagon which was the twin of the one the three martyrs, Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney were driving on the day of their abduction and murder one year to the day earlier in Philadelphia, Mississippi. After the memorial at the burned-out church, the Chaney family got into the back seat of the station wagon for the trip back to their home in Meridien. As I drove out of the church driveway, the Sheriff’s patrol car, a big Oldsmobile with four radio antennae on it, pulled in right behind me. I could see Mrs. Chaney, her daughter, and son Ben, in my rear-view mirror, and, as if sitting in the third seat of the station wagon, were Sheriff Rainey and Deputy Price, in their trooper hats and reflective sunglasses, looking like two angels of death right there, right on my bumper all the way to the Neshoba County border.

By this time, I had learned, not how not to be afraid, but how not to show it. Still, out of my nervousness, I told Mrs. Chaney that Rainey and Price were right behind us. She said she didn’t want to know it. “I don’t want to feel any hate on this day,” she said. It was not the first time that I would hear words of profound wisdom, determination, strength, and goodness - words that, to this day, leave me in awe of the courage and decency of the people with whom I was privileged to live and work.

Later that day, I drove my project director - George Raymond - back to Canton. George was probably the most arrested and beaten civil rights worker of them all. As we drove back to Canton, I was pulled over by the police in the little town of Morton, in Scott County. Two weeks earlier, George had led a demonstration of about 15 people there which was broken up by the town marshal, who had, not too recently before, been released from the State Mental Health facility at Whitfield. This giant of a man put a terrible beating on George, whose arm was still swollen to twice its normal size. George escaped, running nearly ten miles to the home of his fiancée’s family in Rankin County. Brave as George was, he was not too happy to be in police custody in Morton. Somehow - I don’t know how - I managed to talk the police officer out of arresting us, even though I was driving with a New York license. The next day, George asked me to become project director for Scott County. How could I say no? But how could I ever go back to Morton again?

George took me out to meet some folks in Scott, thank God, not in Morton itself: farm families, they were barely scraping by. The bottom was dropping out of the cotton market, and the land in Scott County, in the piney woods section of the state, was very poor. But, they were farmers - people who had long ago learned to depend on only themselves. Within the month, I had the agreement of some of the community’s leaders to speak at the largest church in the area during “Revival” when there would be a big crowd. As it turned out, the Sunday they chose was just a week or so after the 1965 Voting Rights Act went into effect, although, to tell you the truth, I wasn’t aware of it at the time.

I never got to speak to the congregation. I parked under some trees near the church and waited for the church deacons to tell me when it was time for me to speak. In the meanwhile, the local Constable pulled into the drive and parked a few yards from me. In a short time, he and his deputies came over, and started pulling all the paper and materials I had in the truck. “You intend to overthrow the government of the United States,” he said or asked, waving the mimeographed voting materials in my face. “No sir,” I said,

“I came here to talk to people about registering to vote.” The Constable left me with his deputies, coming back in ten minutes or so with three deacons of the church. “This boy,” he said, pointing to me, “came here to disrupt your church services.” “No sir,” said one of the deacons; “he hasn’t been in the church, He is our guest, and we want to invite you in too.” The constable repeated the question to the two other deacons, who each answered quietly, respectfully, and courageously the same way. The Constable told the three to go back to the church, and then conferred with his deputies. He then had one of his deputies write me a ticket - apparently the Constable couldn’t write - handed it to me, and left. It was a ticket for disturbing the peace. My lawyers and the FBI fought over who would get to keep this ticket, principally because it was the first “arrest” to be covered under the Voting Rights Act, and secondly, because it was the subject of considerable amusement- the only ticket they had ever seen for disturbing the peace.

That next week, I went to trial. There were dozens of cars parked at the country store where the trial was taking place, so many that I thought, “Wow, they must have quite a few cases.” As it turned out, my case was it. While my lawyers and I sat waiting for the trial to begin, I listened to the farmers - all of them white - talking, mostly about the weather, and realized that if my eyes were closed, I wouldn’t be able to tell them apart from their black counterparts. The County Attorney, in suit and tie, asked permission of the Justice of the Peace to drop the charges against me and to reinstate the original pretext - disturbing a religious worship service. Then, the three Deacons were called - the only black men in a room of perhaps 35-40 of their white neighbors. Each of the Deacons, under oath, spoke as he had spoken at the scene: that I was an invited guest, that I had not entered the church, that church services were not disturbed, and that the Constable had been invited in as well.

After both sides rested their cases the Justice of the Peace, Jack Henry, just sat there, not having heard one word of evidence to convict, but quite the contrary. So dumbfounded was he, that the County Attorney asked him for a verdict, and when the Justice said nothing, the County Attorney stepped behind the counter and whispered animatedly into the Justice’s ear. After the County Attorney returned to his seat, the Justice said “Guilty: \$100 fine and six months in jail.”

Since my lawyers were not carrying enough money to put up as bond, I was handcuffed by the County Sheriff and driven off to jail - but not directly. They stopped on a deserted unpaved road, talking about “they should be here anytime now,” and “they’ll take care of everything.” They offered me a cigarette like a condemned man and even loosened the handcuffs, which were hurting my wrists. After twenty minutes of their banter, they started the car, saying, “Well, guess they’ll come by later at the jail.”

The story goes on, but let me cut it short. That night, there was a rally of the White Knights of the KKK. I was held on a deserted floor of the jail, but several of the white trustees came up to visit me, making vague references to the “party” they would have that evening in which I would be the guest of honor. At twilight, I was brought downstairs, thinking this was the end, only to find that my friends were there in the sheriff’s office, having paid my appeal bond. The ride back to Canton was like something you see in the movies, with cars of rowdy Klansmen pulling alongside us, trying to force us off the road.

Four months later I was in court, waiting eight hours while the Constable who had arrested me was tried and convicted for embezzlement. I don’t know if there is a formal transcript of my trial, such as it was,

but here, almost to the word, is how it went. Judge, to County Attorney: “Are you kidding me?” County Attorney to Judge, “Your honor, does this mean we have to return the bail?”

That next summer, all hell broke loose in Scott County: Driving in to my home base one day with my two young partners, we had to drive slowly at a very sharp “s” curve. There were over a dozen cars and trucks parked alongside the road there. In a few minutes, we arrived at our destination, where one of my partners complained that his stomach was very sore. A tough young kid, when he said he wanted to go home, we just loaded back into the truck and went back the way we came. The men in the cars and trucks at the “s” curve were just getting into their vehicles and stared long and hard as we drove by. My partner, it turned out, had a ruptured appendix and had to be rushed to Jackson when the local hospital refused to treat him because he was a known civil rights activist.

That week, there were cross burnings and shootings almost every night. The black community now some 12 years after the Supreme Court had ruled that desegregation of the nation’s public schools was to take place with, “all deliberate speed,” decided to enroll their children in the previously all-white school. In fact, 29 students in almost every grade did integrate the schools that fall; both the highest real number and the highest percentage of any district in the State of Mississippi that year. One of the Deacons who had spoken in my defense caught a bullet in the leg; a bullet lodged in the mattress of his sleeping baby’s crib. We counted 27 burnt crosses planted in the area.

Realizing that I had to do something, I reluctantly called the FBI. In the past, whenever I had called - after being shot at, in one instance - they simply told me to call the local law enforcement. This time the response was different. An agent quickly picked up the phone and told me to come down to Jackson right away. The next day, when I arrived at the FBI office, the agent met me in the reception room, telling me that there was a “contract hit” on me and my partners, describing the incident at the “s” curve when the Klan had planned to come out and get us. Then, as I was about to sit down in his office, the FBI agent, who hailed from Boston, asked me, “How many nigger children are trying to integrate the schools in Scott?” and I told him something about where he could go, turned on my heels, and left.

One day that summer, one of the high school kids with whom we were working told me that her grandmother, with whom she lived, wanted to meet me, so I drove to her place - a small watermelon farm. Her grandmother was a bright and feisty woman, and as she broke a watermelon on a rock in the middle of her field, she said to me, “You’re Jewish, aren’t you?” “Yes, I am,” I answered and followed, “How did you know?” “Because,” she said, “Jews are the best Christians.”

I didn’t ask her whether she meant that Jews are a kind of Christian, or that, in her mind, Jews demonstrate the most “Christian” behavior. She was too smart, too worldly, even in the heart of nowhere Mississippi, to have had any confusion about who or what Jews are.

But the lesson I draw from this, and the lesson with which I want to leave you, is not an immodest bragging about Jewish exceptionalism. That was hardly her point, and hardly mine. It is about a set of values on which no people and no religion have an exclusive patent. It was after all, a Jewish plantation owner who put Fannie Lou Hamer, one of the great civil rights activists, out of her squalid sharecropper’s shack in the Delta. Mississippi and Arkansas are in the Bible Belt, and no matter how people define

themselves, no matter what their religious or ethnic or racial identity, virtually everyone here shares, at least in part, a common Old Testament narrative and set of values which is most compactly expressed in the Golden Rule.

Whether and how we act on our values is the question, and doing the right thing should not be a matter of religious or ethnic pride. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than simply doing the right thing. Every one of us is capable of doing what is right.

In the months and years ahead, however, it is going to be harder to know just what the right thing is. The election of an African-American as President of the United States, as many have noted, effectively ends the Civil Rights era. The issue of equal political rights for blacks is now largely settled, and, I pray, settled for good. There are, still, widespread issues of discrimination, but now, given the economic disaster we all face, the broader questions of social and economic fairness will become even more acute. Those issues are far more complicated than whether a particular class or group of Americans is being deprived of their political rights.

I am heartened by the knowledge that African Americans and Jewish Americans have, through both their separate and shared experience, a heightened sense of fairness. All of us as Americans - Christian, Muslims, and Jews, blacks, browns, and whites - will face difficult choices in the face of the world-wide economic catastrophe that is just beginning to reveal itself. I hope all of us will show the wisdom, courage, and humanity which I was exposed to in an extraordinary period in American history. We will need it.

## **Part II**

During his campaign, President Barack Obama stated that one of his objectives as President would be to restore the historic relationship between Blacks and Jews. He spoke of standing on the shoulders of those who had fought the good fight for civil rights in the sixties. And while I applaud Obama for wanting to bring Americans together, the passage of time has brought changes to both communities - changes that, of necessity, alter community agendas, and the bonds of coalition.

Let's start at a specific point, the nexus between Jewish values and Jewish history as they interacted with the civil rights movement of African Americans in the critical quarter century beginning in, say, 1945 and ending in 1970. Here, in the dark shadow and overwhelming stench of the Second World War, America was prodded, coddled and kicked into confronting its own particular moral and political stain.

How America came to this confrontation is an intricate convergence of many factors and many actors; the American judiciary and the Supreme Court; Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson; American industry and organized labor; a rising economic tide that began to crack open the cloistered American South, still hidden from the rest of the country; the maturing of a generation of African American leadership and the rise of a younger generation; and again, the emerging conscience and consciousness of the American body politic that increasingly, in the post-World War II years, took seriously the notion that America stood for certain values and principles which it could not ignore within its own borders.

I will have much to say about how American Jews helped bring the country to this place; their organizational, political and individual contributions, but now let me say the simple thing. American Jewry, through its organizations and religious bodies, but more directly, through a consensus that was woven through most of its households, was, at the most critical time in the 1960's, an almost singular voice within White America validating the complaint of African Americans and their demands for "freedom" and civil rights. It is, in this respect, and this respect only, that I think we can properly talk about "Blacks and Jews" in the same sentence.

All the rest is complicated: Jews who joined the civil rights movement as foot soldiers, as I did, had divergent and often complicated relationships to being Jewish. Most Jews who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement did so as individuals; organizational involvement was important, but far from the full story of the so-called relationship. To put it another way, there was no great gathering of Black and Jewish leaders to write a formal compact between them, pledging their communities to each others causes. Nevertheless, there were important coalitions in which prominent leaders and organizations of both communities joined together roles.

I was raised in the civil rights movement believing that what was important was what the local people expressed as their wants and needs, not mine. I was a community organizer - a profession that only now has been given currency because that was the profession, for a while, of our new president. Part of the community organizer's code is to minimize the ego, and I have taken that personally, and still find it difficult to talk about my movement years in a preponderantly personal way. I have a need for the abstract, the analytical, the objective truth. So, I am going to try to balance these two things - the historical and personal - in this talk. So, first, to a question of definition. Just whom are we talking about, or to put it another way, who are Jews?

The easy answer is to say, "those who practice the Jewish religion." But many, many Jews, particularly in the generations that grew during the lead-up to, and heyday of the civil rights movement, would have hardly described themselves as practitioners of the Jewish religion. Nonetheless, most, if not all, would have defined themselves as Jews - Jews by birth, Jews by tradition, Jews by outlook, Jews by name, but not necessarily, or only modestly, by any kind of religious practice. So, to reach back into the musty pockets of bygone notions about Jews, would you say we were a "race?" - a distinctive genetic pool with clear characteristics as to who is and who is not Jewish? Are we, Jews from Russia, Jews from Syria, Jews from Israel, Jews from India, Jews from Ethiopia all racially identical? We could hardly be more diverse.

So, who are we? What binds us? All these things and no one of these things. We are, for want of a better word, a "people," or people who consciously (and in some cases, not consciously) identify ourselves with a community which is, in one way another, Jewish in parentage, history, beliefs, traditions, values and/or practices. (Wherever you see a comma in the preceding sentence, substitute "and/or.")

If we as Jews have many ways to define and identify ourselves, we do have an historical narrative that defines us both religiously and secularly: the five books of Moses - what is referred to by the Christian community as the Old Testament - and the other books of the Hebrew Bible including and particularly,

the prophetic writings. Our narrative is suffused with the story of exile and slavery, and it is no coincidence that the Old Testament, taught by the largely Christian slave holders to their slaves, became the narrative of African Americans in slavery, and in their freedom movement, the Civil Rights movement. We are, almost literally, joined at the hip, and no matter what strains or wrenching conflicts we have experienced, that bond still holds.

Every year, Jews, even those who are not particularly religious, celebrate Passover. It is a family holiday, celebrated in the home, and we read the story of the Exodus from Egypt, remembering not what God did for our ancestors, but what he did for me, for had he not liberated us from Pharaoh, we would still be slaves in Egypt. This is a powerful, powerful lesson, and the Passover seder has many roles for even the youngest children, implanting its universalist messages of resistance to tyranny and the meaning of freedom even in this very particularist context. [At the Passover Seder at my home, we play a recording of “Go Down Moses” sung by Bayard Rustin, the aid to the great A. Phillip Randolph, and the hands-on organizer of the 1963 March on Washington.]

In modern American history, there were two main groupings of Jews. The earlier and smaller grouping were those who came to this country in the early and mid-1800's from Germany; the second, the much larger immigration from roughly 1880 to 1920 of Jews from the Pale of Settlement - the area in Eastern Europe covering the Austro-Hungarian empire, Poland, the Baltic States, White Russia, Ukraine and what is now Romania. This group is generally referred to as Eastern European, Russian, or Russian-Polish Jewry.

While I was preparing for this talk, I did a little research, and discovered that there were seven so-called Rosenwald schools here in Faulkner County, Arkansas. The Rosenwald schools were the creation of Julius Rosenwald, a Jew of German background who became the President of Sears Roebuck, and dedicated a large part of his great fortune to the building of schools for African Americans in the South during the early twentieth century - a time when the idea of separate but equal meant that African Americans might have their own segregated schools, but hardly equal educational resources.

In all probability, most, if not all, of the Rosenwald schools no longer physically exist, and those who studied there are members of a generation that is fast passing from the scene. But ask around: you might find among your grandparents many who attended a Rosenwald school: there were, literally, more than a thousand of them throughout the South, and they are symbolic of Jewish involvement in what was then called the race or Negro question. Also, the history of the founding and early leadership of the NAACP is rich with Jewish involvement: Joel Spingarn was the second president of the NAACP, and his brother, Arthur followed, and he, in turn was followed by Kivie Kaplan, who served as President into the mid-late 1950's.

So, this was one strain. Perhaps even more important were the Russian immigrants, who account for 90% of American Jewry and its descendants. Unlike their German brethren, these Jews were very poor - the folks of *Fiddler on the Roof* - they lived as fourth class citizens, just a hair above the serfs in Russia, who were “freed” in the 1860's by the Tsar. Many of these people, like my two grandfathers, were raised in an atmosphere of deep social ferment that culminated in the overthrow of the Tsar, first by the democratic socialists, and shortly thereafter by the counter-revolution of the Bolsheviks - the Communists - in

October, 1917.

Most of the Russian Jews fled or were forced out by 1920, with the majority- upwards of 2 million - making it to the United States. Most of them went to work in the sweatshops of a rapidly industrializing America. Others became merchants and some followed their German forbearers to the South. It would take only a generation for the upward thrust of America's economy to bring this immigrant community to the threshold of the middle class. Their parents did what they could not easily do in Europe - they organized and became union members, and played a critical role in the writing of Social Security, the five day, 40 hour work-week, and the effort to break down discrimination against all Americans - particularly for Jews, employment discrimination.

My mother's father came to the United States from Russia in 1908 under a death sentence from the Tsar for his activities as an organizer for the Jewish Revolutionary Bund - the Jewish socialist movement which was largely aligned with the Mensheviks - not the Bolsheviks - in the Russian Social Democratic Party. My grandfather had fallen in love with the writings of Lincoln and Emerson as a young man in Russia, and wrote, later, about the parallel of the emancipation of the slaves in the 1860's along with the emancipation of the serfs in Russia in the same decade. In touring the American South, because of his dark, kinky hair and olive complexion, he had been banished to the back of a bus in one southern city. He was visiting a Jewish neighborhood in Norfolk, Virginia the day that Jack Jefferson beat John L. Sullivan for the heavy-weight title in 1912 and pleaded with the Jewish residents to open their homes to the African-Americans who were being beaten on the streets.

Later, my grandfather became business manager of the Jewish Daily Forward, the great immigrant daily newspaper, and, as business manager, wrote many checks to assist A. Philip Randolph - a fellow socialist and the most important African American leader of the early-mid twentieth century to continue his work with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car and Pullman Porters, and his monthly magazine. The famous March on Washington which is remembered for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech was actually conceived of and organized by Randolph. As a footnote to history, the march's organizing staff came from an organization my grandfather had founded in 1933 to oppose the Nazis, the Jewish Labor Committee. And, for those of the two million who claim to have been among the 100,000 who participated in the March, they remember, as I do, that the other truly exceptional speech was by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

I want to mention two more individuals at this point - one, the most important figure in the twentieth century in terms of Black/Jewish relations who is known only to insiders. His name was Arnold Aronson - you can read about him in Taylor Branch's magnificent "Parting the Waters" and, as the Deputy Director of an organization called, at the time, the National Community Relations Advisory Council (later the word Jewish was inserted), he worked with Randolph and the NAACP to get Fair Employment Practices legislation passed. Jews in the 1930's were blocked from many professions by what we call today, the glass ceiling. Later Aronson founded, with Randolph and Roy Wilkins, head of the NAACP, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which is, to this day, the functioning coalitional body of the Civil Rights Movement, with over 180 civic, religious, ethnic and labor organizations. The LCCR was the advocacy organization that successfully lobbied for the 1957, 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights Acts, which changed the face of the country, and Aronson, quietly and without fanfare, ran the day-to-day operations

and provided the organizational genius that held everyone together during some very trying times.

And it would be a serious oversight if I did not, at least briefly, mention the influence of Jewish religious organizations and individuals during the 50's and '60's. When Martin Luther King, Jr. called out to the national religious community for help in demonstrations in Tallahassee, Florida in 1963, a Reform Rabbi by the name of Israel Dresner mobilized 13 rabbis to join King, get arrested, and challenge the City of Tallahassee in a Supreme Court Decision that established that citizens had the unequivocal right of free speech and assembly to demonstrate. But, there is so much history, and I risk losing the thread of memory, although I had the rare privilege of working with and learning from Aronson and Dresner.

There is more, of course: individuals like Jack Greenberg, who succeeded Thurgood Marshall as director of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and Alvin Bronstein and Henry Schwarzschild, who founded the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee (LCDC) which provided essential legal services for community organizations and activists in Mississippi and elsewhere in the South during the most difficult days of the 1960's. There was, as well, the work of the American Jewish Committee in the 1950's, providing the sociological research data that helped sway the Supreme Court in the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

Yet, in the desire to romanticize what some now call the Black-Jewish relationship, there is a tendency to forget the huge tensions that developed in the '60's around the anti-colonialist movement in Africa and the indictment of Israel as a colonialist state by prominent Black academics and many of the activists in SNCC – the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee: and later, in the late '60's, the rancorous conflict between the New York City Teacher's Union and the local school Board of Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn. These developments, along with the rise of "Black Power", which set the course of "Identity Politics" for the next thirty years (not coincidentally, coinciding with the decline of the national Democratic Party) brought a bitter flavor to Black-Jewish relations.

Now, President Obama, who effectively transcended Identity Politics by brilliantly analyzing and defusing the race issue, has called for a revival of the Black-Jewish relationship that flowered in the 1950's and 1960's. If he and his administration actively try to rekindle this relationship, we will be wise to understand its history, but truly mistaken if we are motivated by a misguided nostalgia. Coalitions succeed when the coalitional partners are motivated by their own clear and well-defined self interests. How Blacks and Jews (and, for that matter, other self-identifying groups in the society) define their interests when the President has transcended identity politics is not a simple proposition. It will require a transformational politics that the President understands, but which has not yet been fully comprehended by the communities he would like to bring back together. The key will be, as Obama has reiterated so many times, in assuring that both communities see themselves fundamentally as Americans – not blue, or red, or Black or Jewish.

In case you haven't noticed, there is an internal contradiction here, but if there ever was a public figure who can figure this out, it is Obama, and these two communities of Americans who have labored so hard to help America realize its constitutional ideal and promise, may, once more, help lead the way.

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**About the Author**

Charney V. Bromberg recently retired from a long career in Jewish community relations, specializing in Middle East affairs. For the past 10 years, he directed Meretz USA, an organization devoted to peace, pluralism, and civil rights in Israel. Previously, he was national director of the Anti-Defamation League's intergroup relations division, where, among other things, he helped revive the League's involvement in Black-Jewish relations. He also directed several ADL national studies on Anti-Semitism.

Bromberg's involvement in civil rights work was a direct inheritance from his family. His maternal grandfather, B. Charney Vladeck was a major figure in Jewish affairs and a prominent political leader in New York City until his untimely death in 1938. Vladeck was a close associate of A. Philip Randolph, the major civil rights figure of the second quarter of the twentieth century and the organizer of the famous 1963 March on Washington. Bromberg's mother, as President of a merging school district in New York state, was one of the first to conceive and implement an approach to school integration that became known as "The Princeton Plan" - the national model.

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