Revivifying Virility

Attempts to Remedy Black and Jewish Male Stereotypes During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s

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Discussing his role in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the student protest movement at Columbia University in 1968, Mark Rudd explained, "Identifying with the oppressed seemed to me … a natural Jewish value, though one we never spoke of as being Jewish."[1] Rudd was referring to the disproportionate number of Jews involved in the protest, particularly in support of Black students. He and other Jewish student leaders closely followed the Black Panthers and Black Power movement, attempted to emulate and identify with them in action, and yet never discussed their own Jewishness. Why would another ethnic group, also with a history of oppression, not bring this point to the fore of their participation? To answer, Rudd explained, "by being radicals we thought we could escape our Jewishness." However, students of Jewish history know that Jews have long been associated with radical movements. What Rudd and other Jewish men in the movement were truly trying to escape was less their Jewishness than their perception of Jewish manhood. What they may not have realized, however, is that in emulating Black men, they were emulating another masculinity on the periphery of American society, as White America has historically barred access of both groups to the American masculine hegemon.

A persistent theme in antisemitic rhetoric is its attack on the masculinity of Jewish men, at times equating them with

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1   Mark Rudd, "Why Were There So Many Jews in SDS?" Markrudd.com, accessed September 16, 2020, https://www.markrudd.com/index-cd39.html?about-mark-rudd/why-were-there-so-many-jews-in-sds-or-the-ordeal-of-civility.html

women, and at others, as aberrant sexualities incomparable to white Anglo-Saxon masculinity. Racist rhetoric also traditionally attacks the masculinity of Black men, though in different ways. This article examines the origins of the two related but separate gendered attacks, and surveys several of each group's responses. It then analyzes the intersection of the two in the social movements of 1960s and '70s, in which both groups were actively reclaiming their masculinity in an overlapping, though not joined, struggle. By examining the two during the same period, in a historical moment in which they worked together or paralleled one another in the public eye, we find an interesting moment of tension between Jewish and Black manhood, in which both simultaneously attempt to emulate one another in different ways, and create conflict in the process.

During the mass migration period (1880-1924), unprecedented numbers of European immigrants, including many Jews, came to the United States, and brought with them a perception of Jewish manhood which had solidified in Western Europe over the previous century. Growing tension between Jews and Europeans, particularly between Jewish and hegemonic masculinity, was largely a consequence of a solidifying ideal of manhood manifested by European nationalism. By the turn of the twentieth century, nationalist movements existed across Europe and had become inseparable from concepts of ideal manhood performed through behavior and virtue. The modern West (the United States included) defined bravery and manliness through honor, devotion to nation, and by individual physical prowess. Jews, often viewed as residents but not as national brethren, held a unique place in European and American society regarding these qualifiers for manhood. Non-Jews often suspected that Jews maintained dual national loyalties,

and subsequently rarely granted them full acceptance into nationalist movements and ideologies. As manliness became linked to the nation, rejection from the national ideal frequently manifested as rejection from masculinity.

For this reason, many countries and empires banned Jews from acts of service to the nation, acts which themselves came to signify manhood: military service, employment as government officials, dueling societies (particularly in Germany and Austria), land ownership, etc. Even in the United States, Jewish men, though allowed to serve in the armed forces, were limited in how high they could rise as career soldiers. The growing nativist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ensured that the officer core consisted primarily of established upper- or middle-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestants.[2] Other institutions of American manhood banned Jewish entry all together, including fraternities, athletic clubs, sporting organizations, country clubs, student groups, and the like.[3] Those behind these exclusions often rationalized that Jews were prone to malingering, hated physical hardships, and shied away from physical confrontation of any kind (assumptions which further denied Jews masculine identities).[4]

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2   Joseph W. Bendersky, *The Jewish Threat: Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000) 2-6.

3   For more on Jewish responses to rejection from American institutions of masculinity, see chapter III of Miriam Eve Mora's "From Talking Softly to Carrying a Big Shtick: Jewish Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 2019).

4   The 1919 American Jewish Committee's Office of Jewish War Records report on Jewish participation was published as an ardent rebuttal of antisemitic claims of malingering and draft-dodging, which constituted an attack on the manliness and honor of American Jews. American Jewish Committee, The War Record of American Jews: First Report of the Office of War Records (New York City:

In addition, Jewish behaviors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often contradicted modern European and American concepts of ideal family structure and proper gendered practices. Unlike traditional European definitions of gender, in which men carry the economic burden of the family and women remain in the domestic sphere as caregivers and educators, the way Jews enacted gender valued study and prayer among men and thus often positioned women in breadwinning or financially contributing roles. Though Jewish male immigrants to the United States pursued religious learning less than their more traditional European counterparts, the Jewish difference remained. Jewish female immigrants often branched even further from the home in search of both income and education. Consequently, the image of Jewish gender roles as contrary to the hegemonic gender ideals became even greater, relegating Jewish men to the periphery of American manhood. The role of women in Jewish life proved more adaptable to Western culture, as middle-class gender norms supported elements of traditional Jewish women's behavior in the home while adapting to the so-called "cult of domesticity."[5] Women took on more dominant roles as transmitters of Jewish religion and identity to the children, a role which previously fell under male responsibility in traditional Jewish culture.

The results of Jewish rejection from male institutions in the early twentieth century were manifold. In some cases, Jewish men accepted that they were, in fact, less

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American Jewish Committee, 1919) 6.

5   This is true of Jewish women attempting to assimilate in both European and American culture, where the middle-class domestic role for women dominated. Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995) 25-32.

masculine than their Protestant neighbors, and committed themselves to remedying their degraded state. In these cases, they opened their own parallel institutions of manhood, like the City Athletic Club in New York City, which had the goal of building up its members in sports and athletics, but never formally discussed or publicized their Jewishness.[6] There were others who believed that Jewish men were no less masculine than their neighbors, and so also created parallel institutions, these ones openly Jewish, as their goal was not to quietly remedy Jewish manhood, but to prove Jewish manhood to American society at large. In the case of the Jewish Athletic Club of Brooklyn (J.A.C.O.B.), for example, the fliers specifically appeal to Jewish boys who were "sick of being pushed around."[7]

American perceptions of Jewish men had continued to follow the trajectory of what Daniel Boyarin called "gentle Jewish masculinity" throughout the World Wars, with a number of ups and downs, particularly surrounding World War II.[8] Jewish participation in military endeavors during the wars bolstered their image of tough, vigorous manhood, particularly fighting in the Jewish Legion in World War I. It was, however, brought down again by the image of the wizened Holocaust survivor that emerged

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6   For an analysis of the Jewish athletic organizations, their publicity, and their goals in New York and beyond, see chapter III of Miriam Eve Mora's "From Talking Softly to Carrying a Big Shtick: Jewish Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 2019).

7   JACOB Flier, Jewish Defense Organization Records; I-490; Box 10; Folder 11; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

8   Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

at the close of WWII.[9] A dramatic change came with the sudden and unexpected victory of the Israeli military during the Six Day War in 1967. The show of strength and aggression by an entirely Jewish army inspired American Jewish youth to claim a more aggressive form of masculinity, one which might allow them to distance themselves from the soft, gentle Jewish image they had grown up with. But the late '60s was a time in which many young Americans were embracing identities well outside of those of the American mainstream, and many young Jewish men emulated the emerging masculinity of the Black community, claiming both a more masculine and American masculinity themselves. The Black men they emulated, however, were themselves in a period of change and reclamation.

Just like antisemitism, anti-Black rhetoric has attacked the manhood of Black men consistently in different but equally damaging ways. As another acculturating community, making their way in American society, Black men also felt that to attain successful assimilation into mainstream white culture, they had to access some semblance of white masculinity.[10] The barriers to that access were quite different from those obstructing Jews.

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9   For examinations of Jewish masculinity during and around the World Wars, see chapter IV of Miriam Eve Mora's "From Talking Softly to Carrying a Big Shtick: Jewish Masculinity in Twenti-eth-Century America" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 2019), as well as Maddy Carey, *Jewish Masculinity in the Holocaust: Between Destruction and Construction* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017).
10   This view takes it as fact that Black Americans have (and do) face the same struggles as a migrant or decolonizing community, in spite of their long history in the United States, as discussed at length in Brenda Gayle Plummer's *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Unlike Jewish men (who were told by American society that they were soft, effeminate, and incapable of reaching the mainstream, valor-based, hegemonic masculine ideal), Black men were told that they were strong, virile, and really quite capable of reaching this lofty goal, but that they were failing to do so because of their other weaknesses.

Quite the opposite of the attack on Jewish men, American media (both mainstream and in the racist fringe) have presented Black men as "brutes," "savages," rapists, and murderers. From the legal abolition of slavery through the Jim Crow period, white American media used this image of the brute, animal-like Black man as justification for unfair treatment and abuse, as well as to resolve white guilt about the realities of Black male vulnerability in American society. Long-held stereotypes about Black men (which presented them as hypermasculine, untamed, and unfeeling) formed in the wake of Black emancipation still hold sway today in the justification of violence against Black men. In his 2017 book on Black manhood, Tommy Curry argued that it is not only the blackness of Black men that makes them more vulnerable to violence in American society, but their maleness as well, specifically because of this perception of Black men as violent and bestial.[11] This constant threat of attack is in itself emasculating, forcing Black men to live in a state of fear and submission, particularly when dealing with white law enforcement.

The consistent presentation of Black men as physically superior, but mentally inferior, has damaged the Black community in several ways. It has obscured the realities

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11   For more on the "brute" image to justify mistreatment of Black men as enslaved people, victims of sexual abuse, and as scapegoats for the sexual violence of American men on the whole, see Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017) 7, 86, 100, 139, 161.

of Black struggles in the United States by explaining the matriarchal structure of urban Black families, often lacking father figures, as a result of male promiscuity and aggression.[12] A 1971 article in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* explained that among lower-class Black couples,

> Either the male is contributing to the economic maintenance of the female partner or attempting to exploit her for financial gain. As a [*sic*] ego-enhancing process, many lower-class black males prefer to see themselves as exploiters, women as the exploited. The man who does not make capital of his relationships with a woman is failing to prove his masculinity.[13]

In blaming Black men and their "ego-enhancing process" for the number of single-mother households, Americans were able (for many decades) to ignore the much stronger correlation of single-mother households to impoverished communities, regardless of race. However, even when lack of employment opportunities became the focus of sociologists studying the problem, they continued to fault Black men, for failing to become more successful providers.[14]

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12   For studies which point to Black men as the cause of familial disintegration in the African American community see the highly influential (though well-outdated and disproven) 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* by Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

13   Robert Staples, "Towards a Sociology of the Black Family: A Theoretical and Methodological Assessment," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 33 (1971): 127.

14   For a full account of the debate among sociologists surrounding this theory and the Moynihan Report, see Lee Rainwater, *The*

White society restricted the access of Black Americans to institutions of all kinds, not just those which promoted masculine ideals, to a much greater degree than Jews ever experienced in the United States. Though clearly distinct, the two share some common elements, like the stripping of male identities to restrict their access to the hegemon. By limiting the rights of Black citizens, the American government disenfranchised them politically, socially, and commercially, forcing them into a perpetual state of financial hardship and dishonor. In the Jim Crow south, for example, Black men were limited in nearly every way, and lack of access to the masculine hegemon was just one of many effects of this mistreatment. Though one of many, this particular denial carried very real consequences for the Black community.

The 1960s was defined by rapid cultural change, redefinition of norms and identities, and new ideas in American culture. Issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and patriotism were proven to be multifaceted and complex. During this time, both Black and Jewish youth were involved in protest actions, particularly in civil rights and antiwar protests. The two groups found themselves interacting in several ways, some familiar, and some novel to the time and place of the American counterculture. Black Americans were at the center of the world's attention in US news, and two streams of performative manhood became dominant in the Black community.

Within the civil rights Movement, the dominant theme of male behavior was dignity through nonviolence. By refusing to engage in reactive violence, even in response to violence against them, members of civil rights protests

Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Trans-action Social Science and Public Policy Report (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

recall feeling as though they had gained a respectable manhood in their measured response and dignified calm. Franklin McCain, a member of the Greensboro Four, explained that by protesting in this way, he had gained his manhood, but not only that, he felt as though "the manhood of a number of other black persons had been restored."[15] The Black Power movement, by contrast, bolstered an affirmative message, which contradicted the previously dominant narrative of Black male powerlessness. They viewed the nonviolence promoted by civil rights leadership as promoting ideas of Black powerlessness and effeminacy.[16] The dominant image of this new Black man was personified by Malcolm X, who followers saw as taking a stand against the "determined effort of a certain part of the power structure to emasculate the [B]lack man."[17] At Malcolm X's funeral, Ossie Davis explained in his eulogy, "Malcolm was our manhood, our living, Black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. And, in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves."[18] Malcolm X's cultivation of a respectable Black manhood was a conscious and recognized effort which continued after his

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15   D'Weston Haywood, *Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth-Century Black Press and a Manly Vision for Racial Advancement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018) 170.

16   Simon Wendt, "'They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men': Non-Violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era," G*ender and History* 19, no. 2 (November 2007): 547.

17   According to Malcolm X (and the Nation of Islam), the transformation to redeemed Black men was achieved by expunging vices and committing to stable, monogamous relationships. James L. Hicks, "Black Manhood," *New York Amsterdam News*: Mar 6, 1965. William Eric Perkins "Matriarchy, Malcolm X, and Masculinity: A Historical Essay," *Counterpoints* 107 (2000): 25.

18   Ossie Davis, "Eulogy delivered by Ossie Davis at the funeral of Malcolm X," February 27, 1965, https://www.malcolmx.com/eulogy/

death, as the Malcolm X Black Hand Society of the World presented the "Black Manhood" award to figures they saw as further promoting this image.[19]

Regardless of which method of performative manhood emerged as the longest lasting or most effective, what is of interest to the present study is the one which Jewish American men sought to emulate. Though Jews of a previous generation would most likely have related more readily with the first image of Black manhood and nonviolence, the Jewish youth of the '60s (especially in the aftermath of the Six Day War) readily identified with the Black Power movement, which promoted a more tough, virile masculinity. Among Jewish youth on both the political left and right, young men felt connected with the movement for Black power and pride, taking it as an example for political action and, in some cases, a framework for Jewish pride and ethnic revival.

Black and Jewish men maintained separate struggles for their own masculine identities during this time, but they did not exist entirely apart from one another. Black Americans, both men and women, were the leaders and driving force of the fight for civil rights, at the forefront of the ethnic pride movement, and the feminist movement as well. As non-violent protest increased all over the country, Jews became particularly prominent among the protesters and supporters of social movements around the United States. Even in non-Jewish specific groups, Jews were quite visible in leadership and among the ranks of civil rights protest. This is partially because of the religious tradition of *tzedakah*, but arguably just as important is that Jews believed that a society which had progressed beyond discriminating against Black people would be a safer and

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19   Recipients included Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sekou Toure of Guinea.

happier place for Jews as well.[20] To wit, Jews comprised two-thirds of the white Freedom Riders traveling to Mississippi; the majority of the steering committee of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement in 1964; more than half of both the chapters of SDS at Columbia and the University of Michigan; at Kent State in Ohio, where only five percent of the student population was Jewish, Jews constituted nineteen percent of SDS membership (also three of the four students shot by the National Guard); there were Jews present in the early days of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); and two Jewish men from New York were famously killed while working with Black civil rights protestors in the Freedom Summer murders in Mississippi in 1964.[21]

At Columbia University, where multiple student movements erupted simultaneously, faculty discussing the Jewish students in non-Jewish specific white protest theorized that the protest was, in part, an attempt by Jewish students to revolt against their middle-class parents and prove their masculinity and place alongside Black nationalists.[22] SDS, the Weathermen, and other primarily white student groups attempted to join forces with more militant protestors, like the Black Panthers on multiple occasions. In large part, they were rejected, not embraced as brothers in arms in a shared struggle.

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20 Hasia R. Diner, *Jews in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 120-121.

21 Numerical data on SDS chapters from Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 44-45.

22 Report by the American Jewish Committee's Information Service on the *Faculty Thoughts on the Jewish Role in the Student Disorders at Columbia University,* November 1968, Box 95, Folder 2, General correspondence, memos & working papers, 1968. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

A professor at Columbia used the case of Mark Rudd as an example of this rejection by Black nationalists, and the subsequent desire by Jewish students to assert their masculinity. He explained, of the SDS takeover of an administration building on campus, "the Black students in Hamilton Hall challenged Rudd... they challenged his masculinity in a way ... you know .... They said, 'show us your way, take your own building,' and he did."[23] Rudd, though this faculty member could not have known it, became a founding member of the Weathermen, a terrorist organization that claimed repeatedly to be fighting for Black nationalists, though Black leaders rejected this claim. Similarly, the Jewish Defense League (also founded in 1968) often referred to themselves as Jewish Panthers, used a raised fist in their logo, promoted the "Jewish is Beautiful" slogan, and in spite of their repeated conflicts with the Black community, claimed alliances and shared struggle with Black nationalists.[24]

One American rabbi, commenting on Jewish student participation in non-Jewish groups, noted that though Jewish students were previously barred from many (though not all) Gentile student groups, the student revolts of the sixties "destroyed these barriers" and therefore Jewish participation in exclusively Jewish student groups suffered a sharp decline.[25] The only benefit to this shift

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23   Report by the American Jewish Committee's Information Service on the *Faculty Thoughts on the Jewish Role in the Student Disorders at Columbia University,* November 1968, Box 95, Folder 2, General correspondence, memos & working papers, 1968. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

24   For more on the JDL and Black Power, see Miriam Eve Mora, "Husky Jewish Boys": The Jewish Defense League and the Project of Jewish American Masculinity," *Journal of Jewish Identities* (forthcoming).

25   Ezra Spicehandler, "National and Social Characteristics of Jewish Youth in the U.S.A," in *Youth Today: A Collection of Articles*

towards outside groups, in his estimation, was that when radical Jews were rejected from some groups, particularly the Black protest movement, they were forced to find a radicalism of their own, guiding those who did continue to embrace their Jewish connection to form more radical, socialist, Zionist organizations. Certainly, when leadership within the Black nationalist movement declared Zionism a form of racist colonialism and accused Israel of oppressing a Third World people, they alienated Jewish protestors who also considered themselves Zionists."[26] However, some Black leaders, whether sympathetic to the Zionist cause or not, used Zionism as an example and precedent for reparations and the creation of a Black state. Malcom X, though drawn to the Palestinian cause, suggested that the Black community use the "strategy used by the American Jews" and explained that "Pan Africanism will do for people of African decent [*sic*] all over the world the same that Zionism has done for Jews all over the world."[27]

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and Essays, edited by Yehuda Gotthelf (Tel-Aviv, Israel: The World Labour Zionist Movement, 1970) 129. Accessed through YIVO at the Center for Jewish History.

26   The Black Caucus at the 1967 National Conference for New Politics convention condemned the Six Day War as Zionist imperialism. SNCC published an article in their newsletter on "The Palestine Problem" which inarguably antagonized Israel, presenting Israel as the oppressor of colored brothers in arms. *SNCC Newsletter* 1, no. 4 (June/July 1967): 5 (accessed through the online repository at Duke University).

27   His view on Zionism, however, revealed little solidarity with what "Zionism has done for Jews all over the world," and much antagonism towards what he believed was the white oppression of another people of color, Palestinian Arabs. He explained, "the Jews … with the help of Christians in America and Europe, drove our Muslim brothers out of their homeland, there they had settled for centuries, and took over the land for themselves … In America the Jews sap the very life-blood of the so-called Negros to maintain the state of Israel. Michael R. Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine:*

In spite of continued Jewish attempts to join forces with Black nationalists, the rift only widened as a result of the Israel-Palestine debate. In truth, their conflict was far closer to home and was based on the journey that Jews had worked so hard to complete in America: attaining whiteness. Whiteness in American culture is not only an aspirational goal, but is inexorably linked to masculinity.[28] Many scholars of whiteness and assimilation argue that to become Americans, Jews also became white (or vice versa).[29] What is fascinating about this interaction is that the Jewish students, bolstered by Jewish feats of strength in Israel, hoped to find a place among the masculine Black movements in America, which, in turn, rejected them for already having attained sufficient whiteness to exert their power over others. And in reality, these young Jewish men *were* joining as white men, not as Jews. They were participating in larger movements, not self-identifying as Jews, but as white activists. A commentator in a Jewish student paper expressed his frustration with this, explaining that the Jewish young man "joins [B]lack

Transnational Countries of Color (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), "Malcolm X, Global Black Solidarity, and Palestine," ebook. "Malcolm X Makes it Home From Mecca," *Amsterdam News*, May 23, 1964.

28   See Michael Kimmel's various works on American manhood, particularly his 2015 work, *Angry White Men.*

29   Jewish whiteness is a topic which has received some scholarly attention in the twenty first century, beginning with the oft-criticized 1998 Karen Brodkin book, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. For more scholarly works dealing with Jews and whiteness, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.); and David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

nationalist groups, not as a Jew but as a white man. His whiteness, his precious whiteness, is too valuable to him for it to be relegated to a secondary position." For this reason, he explained, "he does not understand that his relevance to the Black struggle is as a Jew and a fellow victim of endless white exploitation."[30]

In truth, however, Jewish and Black men, both fighting for their masculinity, were battling very different impediments. Attaining masculinity meant different things to each. Jewish men wanted to be *seen* as men, as strong, virile, fighters. Black men wanted the power, freedoms, and status that Jewish men had already achieved by virtue of their passing in white society. It is a product of their disparate struggles to acculturate in American society that Jewish men felt their manhood was diminished, while simultaneously being presented by the Black community as an example of success in attaining white manhood. James Baldwin explained,

> The Negro is really condemning the Jew for having become an American white man-- for having become, in effect, a Christian … The Jew does not realize that the credential he offers, the fact that he has been despised and slaughtered, does not increase the Negro's understanding. It increases the Negro's rage. For it is not here, and not now, that the Jew is being slaughtered, and he is never despised, here, as the Negro is, because he is an American.[31]

30   M. Jay Rosenberg, "To Uncle Tom & Other Such Jews," 1969; Jewish Counter Culture Collection; I-504; box 5; folder 3; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

31   James Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," New York Times Digital Archive, accessed April 16, 2019, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/

As for the Jewish state, Baldwin explained that unlike the non-violent struggle for Black rights in America, "no one has ever seriously suggested that the Jew be nonviolent. There was no need for him to be nonviolent. On the contrary, the Jewish battle for Israel was saluted as the most tremendous heroism." Baldwin, without realizing he was doing so, perhaps, gets to the core of the tension in many ways. Perhaps no one had ever suggested that Jews ought to be non-violent, but they had, for centuries, insisted that Jews were already non-violent by their nature.

Examining the interaction of these two groups of men during a time in which they were both actively fighting to change their image, their reality, and the world around them uncovers a number of notable features. First, it reveals a tension among American Jewish youth, between a nearly achieved goal of American manhood and a readily available alternative of virile Jewish manhood in the State of Israel. Their desire to share the struggle with the Black nationalist movement shows a yearning for American identity, but with the strength and gravitas of those fighting for their community. By choosing to mimic Black nationalists instead of Israeli sabras, they preferred a tough American masculinity over Jewish revival as the masculinity of choice.

Black activists, by contrast, in both the civil rights and Black nationalist movements, were not choosing a new masculine identity to embrace, as much as proving the masculinity that racist rhetoric claimed they were capable of, but chose not to cultivate. They were not choosing to change themselves, but to demonstrate the fallacy in the rhetoric used against them as men, showing that they were capable of organization, rationality, and dignified advocacy. The reactions of Black nationalists to Jewish

books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-antisem.html

attempts at solidarity reveal a different perspective about Jewish assimilation, one which assumes success and therefore rejects them for their whiteness. This left Jewish men in an odd position, as they were simultaneously still rejected by hegemonic white manhood.

Considering masculinity, and attempts at intentional change to perceived masculinity, in the history of both of these communities allows us new perspective on motivation for historical change. In the case of Black American men, their goals, perceptions of manhood, and purposeful displays of masculine qualities were on the surface. Black leadership discussed them publicly, amongst themselves, and in their evaluations of the movements. The Jewish students attempting to force a new masculine identity on themselves, by contrast, were on the fringes of Jewish society. However, it is in examining these fringes that we can better identify and understand the hegemon. The desire to shed the popular view of Jewish male timidity was well-established, and Jewish men in the United States had been attempting to change it for a century. Jewish protestors of the civil rights and counterculture movement merely showcased this desire in a brief, aggressive, and fascinating vignette of the Jewish American story.