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Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks And Jews In America



Synopsis

Jonathan Kaufman paints a vivid, moving portrait of the relationship between blacks and Jews in recent decades--from the strong partnership forged during the civil rights movement of the 1960s to the angry war of words, recriminations, and highly charged confrontations making headlines today. Includes a new preface and epilogue by Kaufman.

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Customer Reviews

Kaufman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the Boston Globe, has written a fascinating account of the growth and collapse of the "civil rights" alliance between American Jews and blacks. By focusing on the lives and attitudes of seven persons, Kaufman creates a deeply personal analysis of the connections and tensions between the two communities. Beginning in the 1950s, blacks and Jews worked together to end legal discrimination in the South, but by the late 1960s the alliance was suffering stress over such issues as affirmative action and American support of Israel; today the coalition is virtually nonexistent. A highly recommended volume that lends fine historical perspective to recent events. Anthony O. Edmonds, Ball State Univ., Muncie, Ind. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have not completed this book; however, I have found it very interesting and clearly with merit. I still find something missing that possibly will be explained in its fullest before I have concluded it. I believe sometimes some emotions and situations cannot be put in a book and nor does it express the majority and minority if it is to be sold. That being said, I think it is a good book to read

in order to get a glimpse at some of the main issues.

Was as I expected

Book arrived in good shape as advertised. Thank you!

This book takes a good look at some social problems in America. It was written in 1988, but I have the updated edition from 1995. Blacks and Jews are minorities that cooperated during the civil rights struggles of the early 1960s. And there is still some cooperation on that issue, as various states continue to discriminate against minority voters. We see some of the cooperation and also some of the problems as this book as the experiences of six different people are examined in detail. Paul Parks, a Black who joined the civil rights movement in the 1960s, is chosen as an example of one who valued a Black-Jewish alliance. In April 1945, he was one of the soldiers who liberated the concentration camp at Dachau. But in 1967, he noted that there were complaints by some Blacks about Jewish landlords in the ghettos. Parks wanted to distinguish between the slumlords and those Whites who were actively helping the Blacks, given that without White support, Black causes would be hurt. But we see how many of the more politically involved Blacks thought of the Jews not as another minority but as part of the White majority. Next, we see Jack Greenberg and Esther Brown, who filed a landmark suit against segregated schools (Brown versus the Board of Education). These were Jews who saw the issue "not as a Negro cause but as a human cause." Still, there were problems when some Blacks decided to boycott a class that Greenberg taught at Harvard on "Race and the Law" to protest the fact that the instructor was not Black. After that, there is the story of Rhody McCoy, a Black who became the head of the Ocean Hills-Brownsville school district in New York City. Right away, there was a problem with a teacher strike. McCoy kept the schools open by hiring substitute teachers, but this soured relations with the strikers. The issue became bigger, bitter, and painful, and certainly reduced cooperation among Blacks and Jews in the city. The story Kaufman tells next is of Roz Epstein and her family. Hers was just one of many Jewish families in Chicago that supported the civil rights movement in the 1960s. But we discover the effects of blockbusting, as her neighborhood, rather than becoming integrated, simply became almost exclusively Black. Eventually, she and her family felt forced to move to a new neighborhood, a few miles away, in order to be in a better school district and to avoid harassment from Blacks. There is an excellent section about Martin Peretz, who became the editor of The New Republic in 1974. Right away, we see one effect of Black-Jewish cooperation, namely that some Jews who learned

more about Black culture and history decided they might as well learn about Jewish culture and history as well. Peretz, a liberal, couldn't stand Begin, a conservative Israeli Prime Minister. But Peretz made a point of supporting Israel's right to exist in the New Republic. Peretz, a strong supporter of civil rights, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the civil rights movement. But a turning point came in 1967, with the National Convention on New Politics. This group became dominated by radicals who tended to ignore problems of poverty, oppression, the war in Vietnam, racism, and discrimination and instead attacked Zionism. Peretz was more cautious about which groups he supported after that. The final chapter is about Donna Brazile, a well-known political campaign chairwoman. We see her introduction to issues that were separating Blacks and Jews: Jewish landlords, failure of some Jews to support affirmative action, and failure of some Blacks to support Israel. Plus, some specific problems, such as the firing of Andrew Young as UN ambassador and Black Presidential candidate Jesse Jackson meeting with terrorist leader Yasser Arafat. Through all this, Brazile kept her focus on trying to get as diverse and inclusive group of supporters as possible in her campaigns. I was struck by the mention of Alice Walker, who wrote "The Color Purple." Walker is well-known as a sensitive and thoughtful person. The book tells that when asked about Farrakhan, she condemned him as a bigot and an antisemite. But the book also tells of Walker's attitude about Israel, and this shocked me. I'm not asking that she favor some minority, whether it be Blacks, Jews, Pagans, or anyone else. But I am asking someone with her credentials to support human rights against aggressive and lying tyrants, thugs, and bullies. I feel that Walker should have found some way to oppose antizionism very strongly, and I certainly condemn her for not doing so. I think the issue of cooperation among minorities is important. There is a tendency for minorities, often in an effort to win favor with the majority, to show hostility to other minorities. That is not the true path. I recommend this book.

The Jews and African Americans share a history of suffering and bigotry unequalled in recent times. History suggests that they should be the closest of partners in dealing with these issues. However to read the news you would think that they were historical enemies. This has not always been true. The Alliance between Jews and African Americans was a powerful force for change over most of this century. Jonathan tells the story of that Alliance and how it fell apart. As a journalist Jonathan tells this unique story from the perspective of important individuals on both sides. He traces them and their changing perspectives through these significant historical changes. It is this personal perspective that makes Jonathan's stories so compelling.

Kaufman's basic assumption is that the alliance between African-Americans and Jews was never as smooth as history makes it out to be. By exhaustively researching that alliance and presenting it through the points of view of six prominent leaders of the Civil Rights movement, Kaufman provides a unique overview of the racial issues of the previous century, but it is not without flaws. First, like many liberals, Kaufman is too broad-minded to take his own side in an argument. Thus, he goes into great detail in explaining away Black antisemitism, but never seems to realize that there is no Jewish equivalent. Black outrage over the lack of Jewish support for affirmative action is constantly brought up throughout the book, but the use of quotas to restrict Jewish admissions to Ivy League schools is mentioned only twice, creating the impression that Jews were opposed to affirmative action out of a desire to avoid competition, rather than out of fear of being shut out (again) of the professions. He routinely glosses over the records of many of the militant Black leaders who took over after Dr. King's assassination, making them seem simply outspoken or radical, rather than thuggish or criminal, as in the case of the Black Panthers, for example. Anti-semitic acts are routinely explained away as having been taken out of context (his history of the Oceanhill-Brownsville controversy provides a context for the reading of a virulently anti-semitic poem on WBAI that all-but excuses it). His coverage of the Crown Heights riots (in the updated version of the book) avoids mentioning critical facts about the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum and subsequent acquittal of Lemrick Nelson which cast the Black community in a poor light (the jury actually partied with Nelson after the acquittal). The final chapter of the book is a discussion of the importance of the alliance, but it is written on the presumption that political conservatives dislike both Blacks and Jews and are relishing the fight, which is stated explicitly, and which diminishes the value of the book as a historical record. In the end, it's simply an attempt to get Jews to keep giving money to Democrats and Blacks to continue to vote for them so that they can defeat those evil conservatives. Given the rise of anti-semitism since 9/11, the history in this book is even more critical to understanding the schisms in American culture, but Kaufman's bias reduces its value, taking what could have been the definitive history of a critical alliance in the Civil Right movement and reducing it to a partisan appeal.

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