



קבוצת ראות
Reut Group

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TRACKING DEVELOPMENTS IN
THE 'PROGRESSIVE ARENA'

SMART MONITOR, NO.1



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INTRODUCTION

This product summarizes major developments that affect the positioning of Jewish and pro-Israel communities within the U.S. progressive left. It spans a two-week period, July 12 – July 25, and relies solely on open-source information.

This product is part of the ‘Grand Pivot of the Pro-Israel Network Project,’ for which the Reut Group received the Genesis Prize as part of “Speak Out for #Israel,” a global initiative in honor of 2019 Laureate Robert Kraft to combat anti-Semitism and efforts to delegitimize Israel, both of which are on the rise again in confluence with the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

KEY CHALLENGES

Main themes emerging from developments in this time period (July 12-25) focus primarily on the Black-Jewish relations arena, driven by the media prominence of several high-profile incidents of well-known black figures anti-Semitic speech. Other significant developments stem from the fall-out from Peter Beinart’s explosive article renouncing a two-state solution in favor a bi-national arrangement. In parallel, increasing instances of mainstreaming white supremacy threaten to engender systemic effects – Jewish leverage on the left is undermined to the extent that a viable Jewish alternative political/ideological home is diminished.

Showcase on Black-Jewish relations

In the background of turbulence in the Black-Jewish arena, **the growing momentum of the anti-racist struggle is evidenced in several developments:**

- **Rising organizational infrastructure:** The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), a nonprofit collective of racial justice organizations that serves as a hub for the #BlackLivesMatter movement, is experiencing an unprecedented peak. While traditionally many foundations considered it to be too radical, this year the organization has nearly doubled its 2019 fundraising and is attracting increasing attention from institutional grantmakers. Its leadership attributes the organization’s recent rise to COVID-19 and the prominence of the anti-racist struggle, which uplifted their platform and increased awareness.

Structurally, M4BL’s agenda is crafted through the Black Lives Matter Global Network. It has more than 150 member partners working together in a decentralized but highly interactive structure. M4BL has developed extensive policy platforms and aims to train 50,000 Black organizers, activists, strategists and people in other roles. (See [here](#).)

- **Beginnings of a reparations movement:** See a [recent measure](#) passed by the City Council of Asheville, North Carolina to provide funding to promote homeownership and business opportunities – a “first step” in the context of an “American debate taking place on how far the country should go to make amends for slavery and other racial injustices.” Subsequently, Providence, Rhode Island Mayor Jorge Elorza [signed an executive order](#) to pursue a “truth-telling and reparations process” in the city.
- **Conservative backlash amplifies the debate:** Reflecting the centrality of the discourse on fundamental Black rights, leading figures on the political right have anchored the 1619 Project¹ as a reference point. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a [recent speech](#) characterized the aims of

¹ The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from The New York Times Magazine that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery – an eclectic collection of essay and poems tell the story of slavery’s enduring legacy from a variety of angles. The Project comprises: special edition of Sunday magazine (100-page spread), a section of the newspaper, a kids’ section, and a five-part podcast. It is becoming a school curriculum in school systems nationwide, and has been promoted through broad publicity campaigns. Recently, Oprah Winfrey and Lionsgate Productions announced a collaboration to adapt 1619 for television and film formats.

Two central arguments anchor the 1619 Project conceptual framework and are a basis for its proscriptive approach. The first is that the existing system is rotten from its inception and to its core – that anti-Black racism is embedded in U.S. society’s very DNA; the second calls for fundamental systemic change to address the original sin of slavery and acknowledge an economic reality built on the plundering of black wealth.

1619 Project as wanting people to “believe that America’s institutions continue to reflect the country’s acceptance of slavery at our founding,” adding that this “is a dark vision of America’s birth. I reject it.” In a [Fox News interview](#), President Trump cited the 1619 Project to base his claim that “our children are taught in school to hate their own country...” Most recently, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) [introduced legislation](#) that would prohibit federal tax dollars going toward school curriculums based on the 1619 Project.

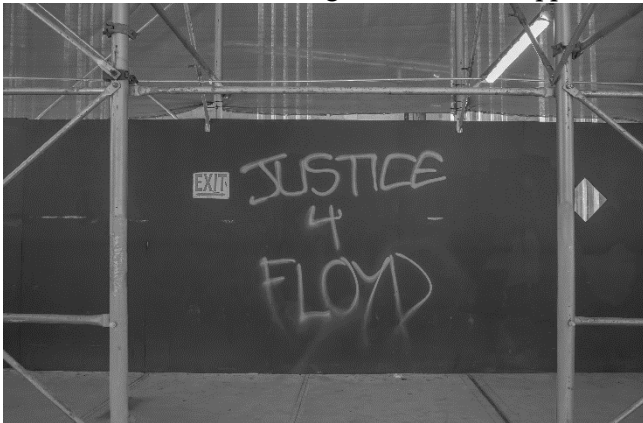
Black anti-Semitism in the spotlight – Standing up to ‘Jewish power’

Voices in the Black community rose to prominent mainstream news coverage and social media commentary promoting anti-Semitism as defiance of the power structure:

- The Nick Cannon hornet’s nest: After being fired by Viacom for comments that included positing that Black people are the “true Hebrews” and that Jews have usurped their identity, Cannon [characterized](#) his termination as a moment “hijacked to make an example of an outspoken black man,” [claiming](#) that Viacom aimed to “force me to kiss the master’s feet in public.” A range of support from notables such as Diddy ensued to hail Cannon as a hero. Left-wing radio host Charlamagne tha God (recently showcased in a [New York Time’s feature](#) in which celebrity’s share book recommendations) [commented](#) on Nick Cannon’s termination: “Listen, Nick is my guy. I hate it had to be him, but that’s what you can do when you have the power. And if there’s one thing Jewish people have showed us, it’s they have the power.”

Following a process that involved an apology and a dialogue with a rabbi, Cannon pointed out that his effort at reconciliation forced him to subsequently experience his “own community turn on me and call me a sell-out for apologizing.”

- Philadelphia NAACP Chapter President Rodney Muhammad [posted](#) a meme on his Facebook page that contained images of actor and rapper Ice Cube, Philadelphia Eagles star DeSean Jackson, and TV host Nick Cannon – all three who have recently come under fire for anti-Semitic comments – and a man crushing people with his hand, alongside the words: “To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize.”



- More subtly, yet mainstreaming a harmful stereotype about Jewish global Jewish political influence: Antone Melton-Meaux, who is challenging Ilhan Omar for her Congressional seat, clarified his independence from Jewish donor money by staking ground in citing his opposition to Israeli PM Netanyahu – implying that the political influence Jewish Americans aim for can be measured through their success in buying support for Israel.

Intersectional bandwagoning on the Black right’s struggle

While the major societal focus in this period has centered on the Black anti-racist struggle, “the coronavirus and Black Lives Matter protests have [supercharged](#) a diverse, intersectional civil rights movement,” raising the public’s awareness of and sense of urgency around issues common to underrepresented communities, and highlighting the connections among them. In this environment, **instances of anti-Israel group’s hijacking of the broader resistance agenda are surfacing.**

Notably, National Students for Justice in Palestine [statement](#) extrapolates from Black demands of white power structures in the U.S. a demand for U.S divestment from Israel on the basis of its similar atrocities. A recent ‘Palestinian Day of Rage’ [rally](#) included some participants marching under Black Lives Matters slogans, enabling interested parties from opposite directions to frame the event as an example of Black Lives Matter in support of the Palestinian cause.

Ben Ami vs. Beinart on the Jewish left

Jews and Jewish institutions are facing an unprecedented dilemma in contending with the prospect of annexation and in the lead-up to it. Perhaps the most broadly rejected and objectionable Israeli policy

move ever for the U.S. Jewish community, it brings to the fore larger strategic questions regarding the extent to which Israel's government policy challenges Jewish support for the country. Peter Beinart's recent declaration of support for a 'one-state solution' for Israel has crystallized and is bringing this conclusion to the mainstream as a viable option (see [here](#) for example). In the emerging dynamic, two opposing camps of Jews on the progressive left consist of those that still believe in a two-state solution versus those whose disillusionment has spurred its abandonment – and that of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state – as an ideal. (See Jeremy Ben Ami, Peter Beinart, and Rabbi Jill Jacobs [debate](#) in a New York Jewish Agenda discussion.)

Mainstreaming White supremacism helps push the bounds of a new normal on Jews

A steadily increasing threat to Jews from white supremacist anti-Semitism on the political right (see [here](#) and [here](#) for example) holds implications for Jewish positioning on the left. A Republican Party that is not a viable candidate for U.S. Jewish support cancels the competition for Jewish support that has been a driver of bi-partisan support for Jews and for Israel. In this context, recently President Trump [announced](#) the appointment of Sebastian Gorka, a right-wing extremist affiliated with an anti-Semitic Nazi Party, to be a member of the National Security Education Board.

Threats to resilience of mainstream Democratic Party Israel support

Democratic Party politics remain staunchly pro-Israel; however, indicators continue to amass pointing to changing tides towards more progressive politics in general, and to the potential for a subtly shifting status quo on Israel:

- **On Israel, the Senate and the House of Representatives authorized \$3.8 billion in defense assistance for Israel. However, pro-Israel groups find themselves working harder for funding** that has traditionally been taken for granted to garner a broad consensus of support and has now drawn Democratic Congressional [challenges](#). Though these were unsuccessful, they moved ushers in excited discourse at the potential for the floodgates to open for Democratic change on Israel (see for example [here](#)).

Moreover, recent controversy surrounding Ilhan Omar Congressional challenger Antone Melton-Meaux – who declared his independence of Jewish financial influence over his stance on Israel following Ilhan Omar's attack on his support base that focused solely on three Jewish donors – provides an example in the context of an ongoing erosion of policy makers' discourse on Jews and pro-Israel politics.

Similarly, while the heavily debated Democratic Party platform draft [affirmed](#) the Party's solid pro-Israel positions despite progressive activists' [calls](#) for it to more forcefully condemn Israel's treatment of Palestinians, it also newly includes an articulation of support for Palestinian rights, alongside opposition to settlement expansion and unilateral annexation. While condemning BDS against Israel, the document notes the Party's commitment to First Amendment rights that may be violated by legislating against BDS support.

- **In the background, indicators amass of growing progressive agenda-setting influence more generally on the Democratic Party and its leadership.** Significant attention is being drawn to, according to this in the Economist, “a wider shift... in the wake of the coronavirus epidemic and racial-justice protests, self-proclaimed progressives (many of them African-American) are ousting moderate incumbents all over America.”

A [solidifying political infrastructure](#) more attuned to the non-establishment political currency roiling the establishment continue to grow their part in seizing upon the momentum for change. These include known groups such as Democracy for America, set up by Howard Dean in 2004 and Justice Democrats, founded by staffers from Bernie Sanders's campaign in 2016; as well as rapidly growing organizations buoyed by new fundraising and campaigning technology, such as Real Justice, which focuses on “down-ballot” races, Color of Change, and the Black Lives Matter Global Network.

Also, see [this](#) Washington Post description on Biden's recent spate of policy proposals as representing “a significant move to the left from where Biden and his party were only recently,” that “reflects a fundamental shift in the political landscape.” Abdul El-Sayed, one of the Bernie Sanders supporters who helped craft Biden's new policy document, said that while Biden is not moving as far left as he

and other progressives want, it is nonetheless an unmistakable shift for a long-term politician who can be seen often to reflect the Democratic Party's dominant worldview.

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Attention currently focused on Black anti-Semitism and the larger issue of the paradox engendered by the progressive community's tendency to indiscriminately lump the Jewish experience in with the notion of privileged status create an opportunity for Jewish communities to stake out a coherent stance and to be heard.

Ripeness for Black-Jewish conversations

This moment that elevates the struggle against anti-Black racism creates some opportunities for Jews to position themselves more legitimately in a conversation that is having, and will continue to have, a dramatic influence on progressive politics. Important dialogue is already happening, and such opportunities can be articulated, modeled, and their progress and replication further invested in.

Calling out anti-Semitism from the inside

A number of high-profile Black public figures are clearly and loudly calling out and condemning anti-Semitism in the Black community. Notable examples in the weeks covered in this report include: a full-throated [response](#) by Charles Barkley, [this](#) by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in The Hollywood Reporter, [this](#) Liz Granderson L.A. Times' column, and [this](#) Jemele Hill piece in The Atlantic. These pieces are engendering a confrontation and dialogue both within Black communities and between Black and Jewish communities.



The passing of civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis brought to the fore an ultimate model of a Black public stance against anti-Semitism, exemplified by Lewis calling out the NAACP for its failure to fully disavow Farrakhan ("You have to bring the filth from under the rug and out of the dark corners so we can deal with it"). In 1995, Lewis made a clear statement of the fundamental importance of driving anti-Semitism from the Black rights movement, refusing to participate in the Million Man March on Washington, D.C. because he could not "overlook past statements by Louis Farrakhan-and others associated with the Nation of Islam-which are divisive and bigoted." (See [here](#).)

Black-Jewish reconciliation dialogue

The explosive nature of events in the Black-Jewish relations arena have offered a few examples, some imminently replicable, of using the challenge as an opportunity to repair and deepen relationships.

- **Candid conversations about each sides' pain**, for example through a live-streamed [conversation](#) between prominent Rabbi David Wolpe, and activist and basketball player Stephen Jackson; and a Zoom [conversation](#) between 94-year-old Holocaust survivor Edward Mosberg and NFL star DeSean Jackson. In his conversation with Wolpe, Stephen Jackson dialed back on some of his hurtful comments and spoke of his love for the Jewish people – though he would not condemn Louis Farrakhan; following the call with Mosberg, DeSean Jackson accepted his invitation to visit Auschwitz together.
- **Local-level initiatives** – With the issue coming to a fore in contexts around the nation, Kansas City, Missouri offers an example of decentralizing some of opportunities seized upon on the national stage to local relevance. In Kansas City, two local leaders' [initiatives](#) – Jewish Community Relations Bureau Director Gavriela Geller and St. James United Methodist Church Pastor Emanuel Cleaver III – focused on encouraging mutual education and ally-ship.

- **Support as an opportunity for relationship building? The potential to leverage philanthropy to encourage communal connection.** Personal and institutional financial support is a critical barometer of ally-ship. In the week following Zach Banner’s posting of a [video](#) condemning Black anti-Semitism, his non-profit organization that provides resources, mentorship, and leadership opportunities to underprivileged Black and Brown students [raised](#) \$60,000 mostly in increments of \$18 (to Banner’s initial confusion). Banner subsequently published an [opinion piece](#) in the JTA explaining his defense of Jewish people against anti-Jewish hatred. On a larger scale, George Soros’s foundation recently announced [plans](#) to contribute \$220 million to support racial equality. While Soros is far from being known as a full-throated advocate for the causes that the mainstream Jewish and pro-Israel communities espouse, there is value in broader awareness of the diversity of Jewish thought and contribution.
- **Focusing on the common threat of white supremacy** – For many Black communities, historical memory of the threat posed by white supremacy informs the current experience – Black anger at the exercise of ‘privilege’ is often explicitly based at its complicity with white supremacy and a failure to call it out. In fact, white supremacy targets two main groups, Jews and blacks, who share – at a gut level, and in an ever present reality – a real common enemy. (See, for example, a recent CNN [piece](#) by Ethan Katz and Deborah Lipstadt that points out that, highlighting 2017’s events in Charlottesville, Virginia, that though “it is too often ignored, both anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism lie at the core of White supremacist ideology.”)

Notably, a foundation of the electoral [strategy](#) adopted by the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), the nonprofit collective of racial justice organizations that serves as a hub for the #BlackLivesMatter movement, focuses on preventing the rise of white nationalist and authoritarian rule. In a local experiment advancing Black-Jewish solidarity, Jewish co-initiator Gavriela Geller explained that, “The reality is we have a common enemy in white supremacy. Anti-Semitism and racism are core pillars of that ideology. We cannot let that external force of white supremacy divide our communities, to divide and conquer, we have to be stronger than that, we have to unite together.”

Taking ownership of the Jewish experience

As anti-Semitism on the left becomes a more visible issue, so does the need for coherent Jewish voices that address the core underlying issues of pervasive Jewish exclusion from identity politics-based agendas and intersectional conversations. Too often, education campaigns focus dominantly on past experiences (i.e. the Holocaust), or on current ‘invisible anti-Semitism’ (the discrimination that even today’s relatively privileged Jews still encounter). Both subjects are valuable and necessary. However, if they are not connected through a compelling narrative that links to the sense of urgency that Jews experience today regarding their positioning in the U.S., the Jewish story will still be ranked on the same conceptual ladder of grievances framed by intersectional thought, and automatically afforded lower status. In this context, recent weeks have engendered an outpouring of nascent attempts at reclaiming the narrative of the Jewish experience, notably through a #JewishPrivilege hashtag – see examples [here](#) and [here](#), ‘celeb’ versions [here](#).

The End.