BLACKS & JEWS
Transcript

Scroll: Early in the 20th century, Black and Jewish Americans began to join forces against bigotry and for civil rights. Their collaboration changed American politics and culture.

In the late 1960's, each group turned inward. The coalition fell apart. Today, the relationship is defined by a public ritual of mutual blame. Blacks and Jews accuse each other of insensitivity, even betrayal. In spite of efforts to resolve the conflict, there are no easy solutions.

(Sounds/Scenes of riot)

Narration: In August 1991, relations between the Black and Jewish communities hit bottom as neighbor fought neighbor on the streets of Crown Heights in Brooklyn, New York.

Journalist Peter Noel: Some friends came by and said, "Look, you know, Crown Heights is jumping off. A kid was hit by a Jew, as they say, and there is a riot going on."

Narration: The riots began after a Hasidic driver in police-escorted motorcade lost control of his car, ran over and killed a seven year old boy named Gavin Cato. Hours later, a crowd of young Black youth stabbed to death an Hasidic man, Yankl Rosenbaum as he walked down the street.

New York City Councilwoman Una Clarke: I was out there each day each night during the entire uprising. Some people call it a riot, others call it a pogrom depending on where your mind is. I think for the community it was a sad sad occasion.

Former Director, National Affairs, American Jewish Committee, Gary Rubin: One of the strange things about Crown Heights is that this riot, which has become such a symbol for Black/Jewish relations in the United States, involved an unusual group of Jews and an unusual group of Blacks. You're talking about a neighborhood which is heavily populated with Hasidic Jews and with Caribbean-born Blacks. and yet it's mainstream Jews and mainstream Blacks who are taking the lesson and who are reacting to it.

(Funeral of Gavin Cato)

Peter Noel: What you have here is foreigners, fighting each other for an enclave. Fighting for Crown Heights first West Indian riot in the history of this city. West Indians led this riot and this is because of the types of frustrations. You know, we are a people; we suffer a lot. So, you had all these people coming together at this point in time and politicizing what had happened to this little Guyanese child, you know, that was killed by an Hasidic Jew.

And this is the piece of concrete that the car hit, and it has remained as a sort of symbol. You know, this is part of the wailing wall. Blacks wail at this particular wall. And it's like a rock. It's very symbolic, you know. People still come to this spot and cry at different times. It's pretty emotional.

(Funeral of Yankl Rosenbaum)

Former aide to Mayor David Dinkins Phillip Saperia: It was a classic visual of the 19th century Jewish community under siege by anti-Semites. I mean, it brought up all kinds of collective Jewish horrors and memories. It sort of fanned the flames of everyone's racist fears because you had Blacks chasing Jews in the streets. I mean, there were visuals that sort of gave the momentum to this thing.

Author Letty Cottin Pogrebin: I think the Crown Heights situation for awhile was being denied by most non-orthodox Jews as having anything to do with them... But then again, I feel that if anti-Semitism is allowed to pass about Hasidism, because they're so identifiable by their dress and their habits, the next thing is it'll spread to the West Side of Manhattan and Great Neck, Long Island, and so on, because anti-Jewish behavior is anti-Jewish behavior-. It's just a question of can you identify the Jews or not.

Gary Rubin: I can't tell you how many conversations, and I'm talking about private conversations that I've had in places like my synagogue, like street corners in Queens where I live, in the Jewish neighborhoods of Crown Heights, which makes it sound like everybody with black skin in the area of Brooklyn was out on the streets rioting... that they're all anti-Semitic, that they all only wanted to kill the Jews. And clearly you had a minority of people on the streets, but yet that's the way it's told as if it's the entire community attacking us.

Narration: The tensions were long-standing. Crown Heights is one of the few communities where poor Blacks and poor Jews live side by side often competing for scarce resources, each group convinced the other is getting preferential treatment.

Project Cure Director Dr. David Lazerson (Dr. Laz): Go down the street and pick out ten random Hasidim, and say to them, "What do you have to be to get services in Crown Heights?" Nine out of ten or ten out of ten will say, "Black." Take ten Blacks walking down the street in Crown Heights and ask them the same question, and they'll say, "Jewish." Something is wrong here.

Hasidic man on street: One thing you can say. In New York City, you got it your way. You can't say...

Black man: We don't have it our way.

Hasidic man: Your Mayor works for you. Commissioner Brown works for you.

Black man: Dinkins works for the Jews!

Hasidic man: What?

Mayor David Dinkins: We've got to increase the peace, increase the peace.

Narration: Mayor David Dinkins' effort to restore calm and avoid further bloodshed didn't work. After three days, Dinkins ordered the police to intervene with full force.

David Lazerson: Crown Heights was like an armed camp. There were police all over the place, on every corner of an intersection--not just one corner, on every corner, four corners. Riot gear, shields, clubs, tear gas, shotguns, cops on Harleys, on horseback, in helicopters flying overhead. It was an armed camp.

Narration: But the police did not help Isaac Bitton and his son.

Peter Noel: I saved him. I'm not trying to be a hero for that. I was trying to just hold him and try to get him away from the crowd, and people were shouting, a woman was shouting "Die, bitch, die." and you know, sticks and stones were just coming from everywhere.

I just saw another human being who was not a soldier in this combat. He was just a victim. Well, he was Jewish, yes, but he was a victim. He was not a part of this combat that was happening at that point in time, and I couldn't see him just go down like that. I was not a soldier in this war either. I was just observing this war and recording this war, you know.

The next day, there's a photo of this man lying prostrate on the sidewalk splashed across the front page of The New York Post. It showed then Black people's inhumanity toward Jews. and I'm saying "Wait a minute. Where is the photo of me trying to help this man?"

And for a couple of months, you know, I just thought about this and never really tried to get in touch with the man Isaac Bitton... until one day, we made plans to meet with each other. and before getting there, I went through this cultural thing. "Why am I going to see Isaac Bitton? Am I just going for a pat on the back from this Hasidic Jew to say: 'Hey, nice boy, you saved me'." You know, I went through all these things before I actually went to see him.

(Peter Noel and Isaac Bitton meet, hug)

Noel: "What's up man? Long time, no see.

Isaac Bitton: "Long time no see. You didn't call me back when I called you...

Peter Noel: "Well, you know, I came from Israel... I was just telling them I came back from Israel, and I didn't get a chance to even call you." And we talked for hours. and I get to find out that he was a musician before. He was a hippie, you know. and he was from Morocco, and for some strange reason I knew then that this man could not be a racist. That this man could not be advocating kicking, you know, West Indians out. For some strange reason, it was there. and we talked, you know, man to man. We became very good friends.

Peter Noel: "Four days in Israel... You, know, it was kind of crazy, man.

Isaac Bitton: "You liked it?

Peter Noel: "It was real nice."

Isaac Bitton: This guy... I just can say that he was sent by heaven, that's all. Right time. Right place.

("The Cure" Black/Jewish rap group sings)

Rapper One (Rev Paul Chandler): "Oh, say can you...

Rapper Two (David Lazerson): 'C'--Communication across the nation. Let's all sit down and have a conversation.

Rapper Three (T.J. Moses): "'U'--Understanding. I can listen to you. You can listen to me. We can work things out in harmony.

Rapper Four (Yudi Simon): "'R'--Respect each other's feelings. Respect who you are. Respects each other's cultures and we'll all go far.

Rapper One (Rev. Paul Chandler): "'E'--for Education, a point of elevation, and it keeps on going even after graduation."

Rev. Paul Chandler: That wasn't too good.

David Lazerson: It wasn't too bad.

Rev. Paul Chandler: and then we do this thing called "We have the Cure..."

David Lazerson: My people here, the Jews here, the Hasidim here, I think most of them were just very skeptical. And, you know, I've had people call me up and tell me that, you know, I shouldn't kiss anybody's backside and that we're compromising, you know, the-hell-with-them-all type of thing.

We met a week after the riots. We decided that our first activity would be let's just bring our youth together and let them dialogue.

It was boom, boom, boom firing away questions at each other. "What's with the beanie on your head?" "What's with the dreadlocks?" "What's with the beard?" "What's with these white strings over here?" "What's the Ankh symbol that you wear?" Just physically, there were a zillion questions that they had about appearance.

"How come you Hasidim always seem to be in a rush when you're walking down the street?" and then, the Jewish kids saying, "Well, how come you guys are always hanging out on the corners?" and so, once those things were sort of answered, then came the real issues, like, well, "s are all wealthy?"

And so, most of the Jews responded, "Well we get food stamps." "We live in rent-subsidized housing." "I come from a single parent home." and a lot of the black teenagers couldn't believe it.

And so too the other way. The Hasidic teenagers met Black teenagers who studied more than they did in their fields of interest. and they couldn't believe it. You know, "No, you guys just hang out and play ball all day and, you know, do rap music. You're not interested in studying." And, and so for an hour and a half, perhaps, we just dug away at the stereotypes.

Rappers: "I know it's been said about a million times before. Change don't come easy, so you got to know the score. If you're looking for a friend, a life-long brother You can't judge a book by looking at the cover."

David Lazerson: These outspoken that we have, I had to answer them. And I said "We're not compromising. We're not kissing up. We're not giving up anything. We need to reach out, and we need to bridge the gap in terms of communication.

(Black/Jewish dialogue group)

Jewish man: "It would make it funnier and safer, I think, if Jews played Blacks and Blacks played Jews. That way, there would be more of a distance there...

Black woman: "How do you play a Jew? I need help.

Black man: Yeah. It would seem anti-Semitic if I...

Jewish man: I don't think so.

Black woman: Because of automatic stereotypes that pop up.

Jewish man: Well, that's what the fear is."

Narration: As in Crown Heights, small groups of Blacks and Jews across the country have started dialogue and role-playing groups... to break down stereotypes... And break out of ritual patterns of blame.

Black woman: "I told them I was Jewish, and there was dead silence and... Jewish man: "You're Jewish? (laughter)

Black woman: "What do you mean? and why do you react that way?

Jewish man: "Well. I'm just curious. It's no big deal. Sure, you're Jewish. I'm Jewish too.

Black woman: It must be a big deal for you to react this way. "

Jewish woman: "You know what? Angela Davis is my hero. I love her. She is so great. And I also really like June Jordan, and I've read all of Maya Angelou's books, and I love Alice Walker... all those Black women writers...

Black man: "I saw a Woody Allen movie once. (laughter)

Black woman: "You know, I really love your hair....

Jewish woman: Oh?

Black woman: "The way it's so frizzy and...

Tikkun magazine Editor Michael Lerner: The desire to have a dialogue and communication between Blacks and Jews is much stronger amongst the Jews than amongst the Blacks.

Harvard Professor Cornel West: But understandably so. You see, because Black people have played such a fundamental role in the shaping of the way Jews conceive of themselves as Americans in terms of their struggle for underdog, you see. So, no doubt, you have a number of Jews who are rarin' to go for dialogue because going back almost a hundred years you've had this identification.

Michael Lerner: Well, but that rarin' to go is also a testimony of caring and concern for the Black community that I want to have Jews given some credit for because I don't notice too many other elements of the white communities begging for access to create dialogue with Blacks.

West: Well, you got some Quakers though, Brother.

Lerner: Well, I wish we'd have a hell of a lot more people involved in having this need. I don't see this need so strong amongst the other sectors of the American population. So, I wouldn't want to hear us being put down for this need...

Narration: Even dialogue can become competitive... but it also provides insight into the other group's point of view.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin: It was a real revelation to me when I understood that the reason why African American women were not coming back to a dialogue that I'd been part of was because nothing was happening. There was no action arising out of all the talk. For Jews who turned up every week religiously, or in that case evers what it was about, because as long as we're talking you don't hate us. As long as we're talking the Jewish perception is that we're not isolated, we're not marginalized, we have you as our potential ally--you're listening. For African American women in both that dialogue and for both sexes in another group in which I participated, at a certain point they want to know how are we going to change the world, and either we work together on it or I'm out of here.

Narration: Today's dialogue groups cannot replace the close political coalitions of the civil rights era.

(Pictures of former synagogues in the Lawndale section of Chicago that are now Baptist churches)

Narration: In the early 1900's, a pattern was established. In city after city, Blacks leaving the South moved north and into Jewish neighborhoods while Jews began to move up and out to the suburbs. One of those neighborhoods was Lawndale on the West Side of Chicago. As Lawndale became a Black community, city services were cut. Police work changed from protection to containment. Banks refused to make loans in the area.

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Fifty percent of the Negro families of our country live in substandard housing conditions. We live in slums and we are hemmed in the ghetto, and in that ghetto, we pay more for less. It's a domestic colony that is constantly drained without being replenished.

King: Chicago is one of the largest cities in the world...

Narration: In 1966, the Reverend Martin Luther King brought the southern civil rights movement north to Chicago, staying in Lawndale, where he led a fight against discrimination in housing, jobs, and education. He received strong support from white civil rights activists like Father Jack Egan and Rabbi Robert Marx of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs.

(Sermon at Shabbat service)

Rabbi Robert Marx: "How much possession does a person need? How much land does a person need?"

Narration: Rabbi Robert Marx, Founder of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs was angry when he found that Jewish real estate agents also played a role in ghettoizing Lawndale... Since Lawndale had been a Jewish community for 50 years, many real estate agents in the area were Jewish. Some of them deliberately frightened Jewish residents into selling their homes.

Rabbi Robert Marx: They were exploiting, but they were exploiting Jews and Blacks, and that has to be remembered. They were going to Jewish homes and say, "You better get out because the neighborhood is changing." They bought homes at much less than they were worth. They turned around and sold them at much more than they were worth. They were a group of people that we fought with all of our vigor.

Narration: Rabbi Marx took on powerful interests in his own community. In the late 1960's, it was not Black people against Jews, but a division within the Jewish community itself.

Rabbi Marx: The rest of the Jewish community, and this is the painful part, never understood, I think, the implications of this struggle. The rest of the Jewish community did not help us. and I feel this, I must confess, it's almost a personal failure that lives with me today, that I could never explain more clearly the moral dimensions of what I saw was going on.

Narration: Inspired by Martin Luther King, a new grassroots movement emerged in Lawndale, pitting black home buyers against real estate speculators.

(Man on phone)

Eddy Smith: I'd like to speak to Mr. Weinberger, please.... I was passing your office the other day, and I saw a lot of picketers out there and I would like to know what's the deal on this? This is Mr. Eddy Smith.... Well, it's in my community and I like to know what's happening in my community.... No, it's not troublemakers, but it's just that the people have finally waken up to what's really happening.

Narration: Clyde Ross was one of the leaders of the new movement, which gathered strong support from a coalition of whites and blacks, Jews, Catholics and Protestants. Like thousands of other Black people moving into Lawndale, Ross couldn't get a mortgage to buy his house. Banks refused loans to black buyers.

Black Activist Clyde Ross: We don't know Jews from Greeks. All we knew, it was a white neighborhood. So we were not separating. We couldn't just point them out and say it was Jews or Italians or Greek because it was just not our style to figure out races. All we ever figure out was faces and they all was white and they all was speculators.

Huntley Brinkley Report by Bill Matney from 1969: There are blocks like this scattered throughout the Lawndale section of Chicago's West Side ghetto. The people who live here bought their homes from real estate speculators at double or triple their value, and they bought on contract because they couldn't get conventional or FHA mortgages. Under the contract, the buyer makes installment payments at high interest, but he builds no equity. If he defaults on even one payment at any time during the contract, he loses the property and everything he's paid into it.

Marx: No one yet has looked at the roles of the banks and insurance companies. Before you talk about a Jewish role, you have to understand the behind-the-scenes role of the non-Jewish banks and the insurance companies who were involved in this. The banks were perfectly willing to put money into the hands of these white sellers but were not willing to lend money to the Black buyers. So, the white sellers, in this case the Jewish white sellers, were the servants of the large banks.

(1969 meeting of the Contract Buyers League)

Community Organizer Jack Macnamara: You're paying interest on ten thousand dollars more than you should be paying at the rate of 7% a year...

Narration: Supported by white civil rights activists, the Lawndale home buyers organized the Contract Buyers League which spread quickly across Black Chicago.

Black Home Buyer John Coldwell: This is getting up like telling that you have found the Lord. It's such a burden off you, you can't keep it to yourself. You like to tell everybody about it.

Clyde Ross: It was just like a revival of some kind, you know. You'd see people coming all through the neighborhoods coming out to the meeting. Sometimes, we have as high as 200, 300 people at a meeting. We would have prayer and singing and speechmaking.

Clyde Ross speaking at Contract Buyers League meeting in 1969: These people who have cheated us out of more than money. We have been cheated out of the right to be human beings in this society. We have been cheated out of buying homes at a decent price. Now it's time now. We've got a chance now. The Contract Buyers League

have presented a chance for these people in this area to move out of this grip of society, to move up, stand on your own two feet, be human beings, fight for what you know is right, fight. (applause)

Clyde Ross: The whole neighborhood got the sense that this was a movement that was going to go somewhere.

(1969 Picket line in downtown Chicago)

Narration: The Contract Buyers League picketed in the downtown financial district, demanding that banks give them regular mortgages.

White man near the picket line: You have to look at the other side too. These people had something to buy. They bought it. I mean, the investors, and now they have something to sell and they sold it. You gonna say because that in what is termed here excess profits...

Interviewer: ...Immoral

White man: Immoral. I don't know if it is. You know I talked to a student here and he said they make fantastic profits. And I said, "What is a fantastic profit?"

Interviewer: But it seems pretty clear that if the house sold for 25 thousand dollars which was valued by the FHA at 15 thousand, that there's excess profits.

White man: Possibly yes. I wouldn't say definitely, but possibly. It would appear that way but it's not necessarily so. But there are many businesses that make fifteen... er... excuse me, 100% profits. Not many, but there are some, and the greater the risk, they're entitled to it.

Rabbi Marx: We tried to get people to understand about the exploitation that we saw. We tried to get them to stop in every way we could.

Narration: Rabbi Robert Marx was not alone. Many Jewish community leaders joined the growing effort to pressure the real estate sellers into renegotiating the contracts.

Former Jewish Council on Urban Affairs Board Chair Alan Altheimer: Egan came to us and said all these people who are selling are Jews--almost without exception--and we think you should get involved. So, Bob and the Board, including myself, agreed that we should get involved, and we did very heavily."

(Big downtown picket line)

Narration: The confrontation escalated. The real estate sellers refused to renegotiate. The Contract Buyers League called a payment strike. Hundreds of home buyers withheld their monthly checks.

Reporter: Why haven't you been sending your payments in, Sir.

Evictee: Because I feel that the contracts that we have are unlegal.

Reporter: I see there so many people around. Would you tell me a little bit about it? Why are they here, Sir?

Evictee: We're together.

(Sheriffs march in to begin an eviction)

Narration: The real estate sellers went to the authorities and demanded eviction of the home buyers. That's when the real battles began.

Evictee: They came up... rang the bell... still in bed... And the wife went to the door, and they served her with a paper and then they came on in.

Reporter: What did they say to you?

Evictee: They said they were going to evict us.

Reporter: Where's your furniture now?

Evictee: Out on the street.

Reporter: What do you plan to do? Do you believe that you should instead of putting your money in escrow and forward it and pay it like you were doing it before. Do you think that you will do that now?

Evictee: No, I won't. I won't give them the money.

Rabbi Marx: I remember being in my office downtown and being told that there was an eviction taking place, and would I come and help?

It was a bitter cold day. I'll never forget it. And some buyers were being evicted from their homes. and we volunteered to go out to the site of one of these evictions, and we physically picked up furniture and moved furniture back into the homes of the people that had been evicted. The sellers had hired guards with guns and placed them inside the homes, and they started firing at us. We should have realized a certain amount of danger. But at the time, the danger was insignificant compared to the anger we felt at this process that was moving decent people out of their homes because they had missed on their contracts... They had missed a payment.

Narration: Hundreds of people lost their homes. The Jewish community was deeply divided over Rabbi Marx's support for the home buyers. He and other white civil rights activists were attacked for breaking ranks.

Rabbi Marx: We were indeed sued by the sellers, sued for a million dollars. Our funding was cut off. There were movements to have us stop, not only our work, but to get out of town. I went to New York for a couple of years. Monsignor Egan, who faced similar pressures, went to Notre Dame. Edgar Chandler, who was the head of the Church Federation, left town and went to New Hampshire.

Narration: The lessons were stark: To confront racism, White and Jewish civil rights activists would have to face divisions within their own communities.

(Rabbi Marx and Clyde Ross walk down Clyde Ross's street in Lawndale)

Ross: Most of all these houses in here were CBL houses.

Marx: So, these were all saved.

Ross: Yeah. All of them were saved.

Narration: The inter-racial coalition was virtually demolished, but not before it achieved most of its goals. The protests helped many Black families keep their homes, and laws against housing discrimination were strengthened. At the time, Rabbi Marx had feared that the conflict would spark anti-Semitism in the black community. But it didn't turn out that way.

Marx: and that always amazed me, that people were mature enough on both sides to see that this was not a Black/Jewish issue. Today, issues tend to become Black/Jewish issues all too easily. They become inflamed in that nexus. But in 1969, if you look over the material, this was not a Black/Jewish conflict.

Marx: Goodbye to you. God bless you. God bless you, buddy.

Ross: Okay.

Marx: It was great seeing you again.

Ross: It was really great.

Narration: Most of Lawndale's Jewish families have long since settled in middle class areas. In Lawndale today, 45 percent of Black families live below the poverty line. Few people--Black or Jewish-- remember the shared history of the Contract Buyers League.

(Rabbi Marx at a meeting of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs)

Narration: Rabbi Marx is now Vice President of the Chicago Board of Rabbis. The Jewish Council on Urban Affairs continues to do coalition work. That has become harder than ever.

Rabbi Marx: It's a great day...

Jewish Council on Urban Affairs Director Jane Ramsey: I will go to a synagogue, and I will speak about what we are doing, and we'll have people ask us why are you working with them? You know, they hate you. They hate us. Why are you having anything to do with Black people? and then, they repeat all the stereotypes and racist stereotypes. So, there is a lot of ignorance within our community about the African American community. There's mostly a lack of knowledge, of fear.

Rubin: 30 years ago, the Jewish community was clearly in the center of domestic justice in the United States, one of the lead communities on issues like poverty or civil rights. But then there began to be a steady slide away from involvement with larger social issues, a greater involvement in particular Jewish issues such as Israel, such as Soviet Jewry, such as combating intermarriage. When that happened, the greater focus on the Jewish to come at the expense of focus on larger social justice issues, which in my view, is and continues to be a real mistake.

(Performance of a scene from the play: "CROSSING THE BROKEN BRIDGE", written and performed by John O'Neal Junebug Theatre and Naomi Newman of A Traveling Jewish Theatre)

JOHN O'NEAL: You gotta watch these Jews, my friend. They will turn white on you in a minute.

NAOMI NEWMAN: Come on. Now, come on. I tell you, you people show no appreciation at all. Have you forgotten the entire civil rights movement? We marched with you. We died with you. What about Goodman and Schwerner?

JOHN: What about James Cheney? You done forgot all about him. James Cheney? See, hundreds of Black people get beat up and killed, and all you people can think about is two little Jews.

NAOMI: Oh, wait a minute... Just a touch of reality here: Jews made up two thirds of the white freedom fighters, one half of the Mississippi volunteers, they gave three quarters of the money, and we are less than 3% of the American population. Now, I don't think that's "two little Jews".

JOHN: Oh, come on. Wait a minute. Let me tell you something. Those people didn't get involved in the civil rights movement because they were Jews. They did it because they were liberals. Some was even radicals.

NAOMI: Well, right, right. Of course. Because for lots of Jews being liberal or radical comes from and is our religion.

JOHN: Oh? Well, it seems that your religion has lost a lot of its practitioners here lately. Where are these people at now?

NAOMI: Oh, love it! I really love it! First you kick us out of the movement with all your Black power stuff. Then you accuse us of abandoning you. Now that is really tricky.

JOHN: No no no, you are ducking the issue, my darling. I'm asking where they are right now.

NAOMI: and I'm answering, my darling. Some of them went to where you told them to go.

JOHN: Where is that?

NAOMI: Back to work in their own communities. And others went into peace, ecology, and other progressive movements. of them went to these big corporations and colleges and universities, climbing up the corporate ladder where they are sitting dead in the door in front of affirmative action right now. I know what's going on.

NAOMI: Okay. Okay. Some of them did...

JOHN: All right.

NAOMI: ...Mainly men. But what's the use? It is always the same. If it's good it's not you, but if it's bad, it's the Jew!

Stanford History Professor Clayborne Carson: One of the most unfortunate aspects of the breakdown of the effectiveness of Black/Jewish/activist politics is that that represented a tradition that offered a set of tools for powerless people to get a measure of power. So, a young person today who is discontented and wants to change things, you know, what is the political vocabulary open to that person when, you know, all we see around us are leaders who kind of express some kind of narrowly conceived group interest?

(The Million Man March in Washington, D.C.)

Podium speaker: Black men!

Crowd: Yeah!

Podium speaker: Black men!

Crowd: Yeah!

Podium: I am pleased to announce that as of 10 AM, our count is over one million black men... Black men. Black men...

Crowd: (Chant) Long Live the spirit of the Million Man March.

Journalist and former Nation of Islam member Salim Muwakkil: One million... I think it will be more. Maybe a million and a half.

Narration: For most Black Americans, the Million Man March was an inspiring expression of group solidarity... And a re-dedication to a struggle against violence, drugs, and police brutality.

Radio Engineer: Salim. We're going on the air in a few minutes.

Salim Muwakkil: Okay.

Narration: For most Jewish Americans, the march was a populist rally led by a dangerous demagogue.

Salim Muwakkil: On, this mike?

Radio engineer: Yes.

Salim Muwakkil: Farrakhan... Minister Farrakhan had the foresight, insight and the platform to call this march. I mean, he's perhaps the only indigenous, independently nourished Black leader that's out here. He's not beholden in any way to any white institution. So, he was the one who could make a pure call and that's why I think that people

responded so enthusiastically, but everyone has claimed this march. It's for all Black men because we all suffer the same miseries.

All you have to do is go out into the streets of Black America and talk to some of the people who are suffering the most and ask them what they think about the Nation of Islam. And they don't see fascism; they don't see a kind of oppressive patriarchy. They see safety and security. And as long as that's all that can give them safety and security, there's nothing I can tell them. The only way I can tell them something that they'll listen to is for me to be happy about their safety and security and let them know that there's something to watch out for in that safety and security.

I know! I used to be a member of the Nation of Islam. I mean, I know these people. I know that their motivation is not evil. I know what's driving them to seek these answers.

(Group with Muwakkil down street in Chicago)

Salim Muwakkil: There are a group of us in Chicago who were brought here by the Nation and many of them are now out of the Nation, like myself. And we get together periodically, kind of an alumni association, unofficial, and we talk about these things pretty seriously.

Former Muslim Girls Training (MGT) member Fatimah Halim: We like Farrakhan because Farrakhan is much more aggressive. You know, he speaks what he feels. And he could give a damn less about what anybody thinks.

Former Nation of Islam member Rafi Abdul Kushmir: The brothers that I saw on the street who were in the Nation were guys I knew. So, the Nation became personally endorsed by people that I knew, that I had a similar background to, that, you know, walked the same streets I did, talked the same talk I talked, you know what I'm saying?

Salim Muwakkil: So, I decided to go ahead and just do it, just take the jump. You know, a lot of things I didn't agree with, with the Nation, or didn't understand. But I saw that they were doing, they seemed to be doing what needed to be done. And if they were doing what needed to be done, why was I reluctant to get involved with them? and so I... I took that jump. I joined.

Fatimah Halim: I would have to say that my greatest lessons in womanhood came in the Nation of Islam. I learned a lot about relationships. I learned a lot about marriage. I learned a lot about the sisterhood and the sanctity of the sisterhood. So, the MGT was really great. The only thing I really never learned was how to make a bean pie. (laughter) They tried. They tried, and I cheated.

Salim Muwakkil: There were other aspects of my life that I didn't mention but during this period, I became a father, during the period when I was in the service. and I was treating that situation as so many of my colleagues were treating it, as just, you know, something that happens and, you know, sometimes maybe my child will get supported and maybe she won't.

And the Nation had a different idea about that. The Nation said, you know, marriage is the way you have to deal with this. and so, I became much more concerned about family. It forced me to, to act responsibly in that way. And, and it did change me.

Fatimah Halim: There was a part of myself that I had to give up, that uniqueness, you know, because when you come into the Nation there's no such thing as uniqueness. You know, we all had to basically be the same. We all had to wear the same clothes. We all to basically say the same types of things, feel the same type of way.

Salim Muwakkil: It's a very austere doctrine. No smoking, no drinking, no pop culture, no fornication... It was basically the Christian coalition... you know, Christian fundamentalism all over again.

Minister Louis Farrakhan: We can't bring our families to the movies because the American people have an appetite like a swine, and you are feeding the swine with the filth of degenerate culture. We got to stop it.

Salim Muwakkil: Farrakhan can teach that fire and brimstone message and that basic what I call '"Jerry Falwell in blackface" essentially, the kind of fundamentalist message, and yet he has a lot of young people going for it. This no sell out attitude. It's something that's very attractive to young people.

I speak to a lot of student groups, Black student groups, and whenever I mention this issue, that we should watch it when it come to anti-Semitism, I notice that students begin to, you know..."Is he a sellout?" You know I started to get those kind of responses.

And they could care less about what is considered the anti-Semitic elements of Farrakhan. They don't have enough historical perspective to understand that the core of Farrakhan's message is one of genetic determinism, one of racism.

I'm troubled by some of the anti-Semitism I run into myself out in the activist community, and I've been speaking out against it for a while. And whenever I do speak out against it, it seems that there's a reaction to what I say which is "You're exaggerating." But I think that many Black activists are closing their eyes to something that can be very dangerous.

Minister Farrakahn: The Jews don't like me. They didn't like Jesus. The modern Romans, the Jews put the Romans on Jesus. And the Zionists are stimulating and pulling strings in Washington...

Salim Muwakkil: I think that especially now in this particular political climate in which everyone is becoming much more tribal in their responses, I think to have this easy resort to scapegoating is something that we should be much more careful about doing.

Minister Farrakhan: You are the synagogue of Satan, and you have wrapped your tentacles around the US government, and you are deceiving and sending this nation to hell. But I warn you in the name of Allah, you would be used to leave me alone. But if you choose to crucify me, know that Allah will crucify you.

Gary Rubin: There used to be in the fifties and sixties, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, almost a taboo on public expressions of anti-Semitism. What scares Jews today is that the taboo of anti-Semitism in major American institutions seems to be breaking down. So that on the university campus, for example, there are a disturbing number of people who are teaching things about Jews which are clearly anti-Semitic, like that Jews controlled the slave trade. Not that Jewish merchants participated in the slave trade, 'cause there certainly were Jewish merchants who participated along with other merchants in the slave trade, but that's not what's being said. What's being said is that Jews were the controlling elements of the slave trade, which is certainly not true historically. Not only wasn't it true historically, the only reason people would say that was to try and destroy the notion of a Black/Jewish alliance and therefore to hurt Black/Jewish relations today.

(Audience listens to a speaker at Howard University)

Nation of Islam spokesman Khallid Muhammad: You say you lost six million and we question that. You say you lost six million, but...

Narration: The controversies have become a repeated public ritual of call and response, a spectacle often performed for television. It starts with an anti-Semitic provocation.

Khallid Muhammad: The so-called Jew holocaust...

Narration: Next, Jewish leaders demand that Black leaders repudiate the hate speech.

(Public television talk show)

Rabbi David Saperstein: If you remain silent in the face of bigotry that you destroy everything that protects both of us.

Black Community Activist Al Sharpton: I agree which is why I was not silent, but I'm also not going to have someone else write my speeches on how I'm not going to be silent.

Journalist Jim Sleeper: This is beyond Khallid, Al. and you can't squirm out of it.

Sharpton: It's way beyond Khallid. It's about the distortion that people want to set up to continue this match and they can't back it up with facts.

Sleeper: Al, this is a game that you're not going to be able to play.

Sharpton: Well, first of all, we're not playing a game.

Sleeper: You come down to a line that you really have to look at.

Sharpton: Mr. Sleeper, we are not playing a game.

Sleeper: You cannot deal with Farrakhan and be the kind of minister you say you are. You cannot deal with Farrakhan and be the kind of leader you say you are.

Narration: The ritual continues. Many Black leaders resent the call for repudiation.

Sharpton: I want to make it very clear to you and to anyone else that you and no one else can dictate...

Sleeper: It's not a question of... That's a dodge. It's always this dodge about who is dictating. This has got to come from you. I'm just speaking to you person to person, not as a dictator.

Sharpton: First of all... first of all... you have got to let me speak... or there is no reason for us to sit around the table.

(ABC talk show)

Narration: Some Blacks—confronted on talk shows go only part way in meeting Jewish demands--repudiating the speech, but not the speaker.

Cornel West: I do believe that Minister Farrakhan's language and rhetoric has caused pain in the Jewish community and we've had dialogues about that in terms of dealing with a certain anti-Semitic sensibility, but you see there's a difference between a Nazi or one calling for genocidal solutions to Black existence or Jewish existence as opposed to those who have certain xenophobic elements in their rhetoric.

Narration: Many Jews say that's not enough. The media focuses on those who take a hard line.

Rabbi Marvin Hier: What kind of signal is that? Is he really disassociated from Farrakhan? Is he only disassociated from Farrakhan in front of the eyes... you know, in front of the press for two minutes and then things go back to normal.

(An argument among Black and Jewish students on the campus of San Francisco State University)

Jewish male student: This reinforces a very negative stereotype about Jewish people, who are my ancestors.

Black woman student: We have been up here, and yet we are discriminated against for so long...

Narration: For young people, these arguments are all that remains of the Black-Jewish coalition. The ritual ends to the advantage of leaders in each community who advocate separatism.

Clayborne Carson: Now the question is, who is using whom? Farrakhan has in a sense thrown a hand grenade into this Black/Jewish alliance that he doesn't believe in and doesn't support anyway. You know, he doesn't mind it if there's a disruption in Black Jewish relations. He doesn't want Black-Jewish relations. So, I think from his perspective, there's all to be gained and very little to be lost by initiating these controversies.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin: I think that the African American community has not come to the Jewish community to ask us to disavow because it's useless and they also don't perceive us to be responsible for what every Jew says. They

seem to understand that when Koch spoke, or, when he was alive when Rabbi Meir Kahane spoke, that that was a kind of extreme wing and most progressive Jews didn't subscribe to those views. Jews somehow or other go into the Black community lately when asking them to repudiate something, and I think that's certainly not the basis on which any kind of collective action can be pursued.

(Scenes from old movies that portrayed racist stereotypes of Blacks)

Narration: These racist images are part of the history of Hollywood, but some critics of the motion picture industry say Blacks are still stereotyped in movies and blocked from real power in the industry.

Screenwriter and Poet Wanda Coleman: If you don't control your images, you control nothing. I keep praying for the day when there will be enough Blacks who will have enough impetus, enough money, enough independence, enough whatever it takes to control our niche of the industry and that's not necessarily going to be a panacea.

Cinema History Professor Albert Johnson: Envy is at the background of a lot of this sniping at Hollywood as a Jewish hierarchy. I don't think they've looked into it enough. I mean, the Jewish businessmen who started the industry were looking out for their own, they were looking out for their own. and this is natural, I think, when you have that kind of ethnic hierarchy. It would be the same as if it was Blacks or if it was Asian Americans or whatever.

Narration: Jews played a major role in creating the Hollywood studios in the early 1900's, a time when anti-Semitism prevented Jews from entering more established industries. In Hollywood, these Jewish immigrants re-defined themselves as White Americans, and, in the process, many adopted and conveyed in their films the prevailing stereotypes of Black Americans.

Johnson: It just so happens that it was these Jewish men back in the 20s that put Hollywood on the map and built it into a great industry. But I think it's being prejudicial and anti-Semitic to blanketly say that it's the Jewishness of the Hollywood production system that controls the way that Blacks are portrayed in film. I think it's a matter of what is popular because what is controlling all of Hollywood is money, the making of money.

(Opening of the Academy Awards ceremony)

Announcer at Academy Awards: Ladies and Gentlemen... the President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sc Arthur Hiller.

Film Director Arthur Hiller: To all billion of you in our audience scattered around the world... Good Evening.

Arthur Hiller: I never felt an advantage in being Jewish, nor did I feel a disadvantage in being Jewish. What I did find was that despite the fact that there were many Jewish leaders in the industry there was a hesitation about doing Jewish stories or dealing with Jewish issues, "Oh no, we mustn't push ourselves," so to speak.

Wanda Coleman: I was the eighth minority member of the Writers Guild. I went around eagerly pitching my ideas, talking to studio executives, and what not, but I couldn't score another hit. You know, I thought once the door was open, it stayed open, but it didn't work that way. I didn't understand that it took a political movement to wedge those cultural doors open.

Virtually everyone I'm pitching to is Jewish. Jewish executives usually know it all and are more readily argumentative and are more inclined to dismiss you faster. Whites will listen more. Whites are not afraid to acknowledge that they may be ignorant about your circumstances or where you're coming from. See? Jews assume a kinship that may not be in evidence as far as I'm concerned. They assume an alliance; they assume a common ground.

Arthur Hiller: Sometimes I say to people "The answer is to any question you want to ask me about Hollywood, the broad questions, the answer is 'money'." When people say "Well, why does this happen?" It's almost always financial because it is a business. Now, we who make the films consider it an art form, and we try to do our work in a very creative way and hopefully making some kind of entertainment and some kind of social comment at the same time, you know, whenever you can.

(Clip from "Silver Streak", starring Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor. Directed by Arthur Hiller")

Gene Wilder: "It'll never work. Never.

Richard Pryor: "What are you afraid it won't come off?

Wilder: "That's a good joke. That's humorous. May I speak? This is craz!. It'll never work, do you understand?

Pryor: "Are you kiddin'? Look at that. Al Jolson made a million bucks looking like that. Now here, you try it."

Arthur Hiller: The scene in "Silver Streak" where Richard Pryor teaches Gene Wilder to be blackfaced, I loved being able to do that scene because we could do it with an honesty and humor. and it's how he teaches him step by step to be Black enough to sneak by the guards and they do.

Albert Johnson: Well, it's very funny. I mean, it's hilarious. I mean, Black people can laugh themselves a lot. and the idea of a white person putting on blackface in that sense was much funnier than Al Jolson putting on blackface in his films in the 1930s.

Also, there was a teamwork there between Wilder and Pryor, which works very well. and actually, Black audiences would get more out of Richard Pryor because he was playing on a double level in many ways. I mean the white audience would laugh, but the Black audience would laugh more because we could see another dimension in what he was doing.

Arthur Hiller: When we filmed it that night, I got the call from Richard Pryor about 11 or 12 at night, that he was disturbed, he felt that some of our doing during the day had not, had been anti-Black or was disturbing. And I said, "It felt fine to me Richard," I said, "But if you feel that, we will do it again tomorrow, and you tell me anything that bothers you or whatever's different."

We did it again the next day. I could not feel any difference. It was basically something he felt. and indeed, there may have been that difference. I think what he was saying way "It won't make a difference to the white audience, but the Black audience will feel something a little different."

(Clip from "Silver Streak")

Gene Wilder: "I don't think we'll make it past the cops.

Richard Pryor: "We'll make it past the cops I just hope we don't see no Muslims."

Professor of Jewish History David Biale: Jews, I think, have a double kind of identity with respect to power. On the one hand, a sense of themselves as a very endangered minority, and this comes from our experience in Europe. And on the other hand, our experience in America, which particularly since World War II has really been an experience of coming closer to centers of power. Economic empowerment. In particular, social integration. And there's a kind of schizophrenia in Jewish identity between, on the one hand, the sense of closeness to power, and on the other hand, this continuing memory of victimization. So, I think this is the tension in which Jews live, and it's a tension which they are not always willing to acknowledge.

Clayborne Carson: For Blacks there's been a contrary sense of no matter how rich you are, no matter how much you can get as an individual you've always got these racial barriers. From our perspective, Jews have it well in America. Anti-Semitism is nowhere near as significant in terms of affecting Jews as racism is affecting Blacks. And obviously Jews have succeeded to a much greater degree in American society than Black people. So, from our perspective, what's the problem?

(Scene from the play "Crossing the Broken Bridge")

JOHN O'NEAL: You don't understand a thing. 400 years of legalized terror... No rights at all that white people are obliged to respect....

NAOMI NEWMAN: You don't understand that every time we hear anti-Semitic remarks, our blood freezes over...

JOHN: You don't understand at all...

Narration: Why should understanding be easy? Where does that expectation come from? When the political will is there, groups have overcome their differences. If the will is not there, even small irritations become unforgivable. The ritual tilts out of control as each group competes to be the greater victim.

JOHN: When are you going to stop whining about the holocaust?

NAOMI: When are you going to stop whining about slavery?

Castlemont High School Student Bahatay Milsap: It wasn't like a real laugh, like a falling out or outrage laugh. It was more of just a giggle. You know, like "God, you know, why would that happen like that?"

Chronicle News Manager David Hyams: What I noticed right away was that it was Castlemont. It wasn't kids from the Mission District or kids from Idaho or kids from Chinatown. It was kids from a Black school who were laughing at the Holocaust.

Narration: In January 1994, on Martin Luther King's birthday, 69 students and their teachers from Castlemont High School in Oakland, California, went on a field trip to see "Schindler's List," Steven Spielberg's dramatic film about Nazi persecution and genocide against the Jews during World War II. What happened at the theater sparked a new round of the Black-Jewish ritual. Misunderstandings were magnified by the media, misinterpreted by the community, and used by politicians.

Castlemont Staffer Jerry Wolfe: It was apparent right from the start that you could see all the mistakes that were made by the adults in terms of right from probably the moment this trip became somebody's idea.

Radio talk show host: Okay, we would especially like to encourage anyone who might have been in the audience to give us a call at 848-4425. Hello caller, you're on the air.

Radio caller: Hi, I was in the audience with my 13 year old son and two other friends. and my experience was of noise for the whole hour. and I was going like "Who spends money to see a film on the Holocaust just to disrupt it." and I thought, "Are these Nazi sympathizers?" I couldn't understand who these people were.

Grand Lake Theatre Owner Allen Michaan: I encountered a number of very, very upset, very agitated patrons in the lobby demanding that something be done about what was going on inside the theater. and I asked what was happening. and they said, "Oh, there's a group of kids that have been noisy and disruptive throughout the whole film, and now they're laughing at scenes of people being summarily executed by the Nazis.

Jerry Wolfe: All of a sudden, the lights went up. At least it seemed that way. All of a sudden, the lights went up. and the theater manager, whoever he was, came marching down the aisles, yelling "All Castlemont students are to leave the theater immediately. Your teachers will meet you at the bus."

Castlemont Student Maribel Corral: When we were asked to leave, the entire audience at the Grand Lake Theater turned around, looked at us, clapped and we left. and we were standing outside of the theater, and we were asked by management to leave from in front of the Grand Lake Theater. So, we had to walk across the street to a park and wait 'til our bus came, and we didn't get to see the movie.

Jerry Wolfe: What happened after that is history.

(Television newscasts)

Newscaster One: "Coming up on the Night Beat, high school students thrown out a showing of 'Schindler's List' say they'll go back."

Newscaster Two: "In Oakland this week a group of high school students went to see the movie "Schindler's List." It's a film about the horrors of the Holocaust, and that's what their teachers said they wanted the students to learn.

Reporter One: "At one point in the movie, there was a very graphic execution scene which prompted laughter from the students. That, in turn, prompted dozens of patrons to leave their seats, upset and complaining."

Reporter Two: "It was a field trip that not many of those students aren't likely to forget, and if there's something good to come out of this story, that's it."

Castlemont Teacher Anisa Rasheed: We came back Tuesday, and somebody said, "Girl did you hear what happened?" and that the kids had gotten kicked out of this movie theater.

We had a lot of students who had really deep emotional reactions, who felt that they were being unfairly accused. It seemed like every period we were asked to let the kids vent. and I had one student who broke down in tears because of what was in the paper.

Castlemont Student Body President Kandi Stewart: I want them to know that we're human, and everything that happens here could happen at another school because we're the same students that's everywhere else. It's too many stereotypings of just teenagers in general too. They stereotype teenagers as doing this and that and this and that. And how could you do that if you was a teenager once yourself?

David Hyams: What made it a story from the first was the mix of "Schindler's List", of teenagers and of the Black/Jewish conflict. That you have three what you'd call "good components" for a news story.

Stuff about kids is good, stuff about a hot movie is good, stuff about a latent underlying conflict is certainly newsworthy when it erupts. So, it had a lot of elements going into it. and the mix, in the pure news sense of the way a disaster is good--as a good news story, or an earthquake is a good news story. This was a good news story.

(Castlemont student press conference)

Kandi Stewart: Hi, I'm the student vice-president at Castlemont High, Kandi Stewart, and I want to introduce our student speakers for today, which is Traci Wilson, Nathaniel Osborne and Maribel Corral.

Maribel Corral: We are sorry for putting the City of Oakland in the news in a negative way. We now understand the range of emotions you've expressed in the hundreds of phone calls we have received. We sympathize with those we offended. We hope we get a second chance to make a good impression by preparing to see the film again and demonstrating that we can do it differently.

Reporter question: Do you think there was adequate training before you went in to see the film earlier this week?

Castlemont Student Tracy Wilson: No, I think it wasn't adequate training because, I mean, the majority of us didn't really know about the Holocaust. And we thought we were going to go ice-skating. You know, like a regular field trip, go ice-skating and to the movies. But it turned out we were going to the movies first and then ice-skating.

(Scene from "Schindler's List")

Concentration Camp Commander: "Shoot her here on my authority."

Woman: "It will take more than that.

Commander: "I'm sure you're right."

Maribel Corral: The actual incident of Jews being persecuted was not funny, but the graphic illustration on screen was humorous to some people. We understand that this is a film and that woman really didn't die. I mean they're treating us like children, like that woman really died, you know?

And I understand that people did die in the Holocaust, but that's not what the laughter was targeted at. It was more laughing at, you know, the way the woman fell or whatever. It wasn't a anti-Semitic thing just because she was a Jew, and she was shot in the head. It was really funny. That's not what happened.

David Hyams: The Black point was that "Hey, we're just kids or, hey, this happens all the time or this wasn't so bad." The Jewish point was I think the one I had of, boy, they're laughing at the Holocaust.

Castlemont Student Cicely Hall: To me, after what happened, it seemed like it was starting to become a race issue. It was like they think like Black folks against Jewish people and white people. And I was like, this is stupid. I mean, we laugh at, kids laugh at a movie that happened to be about the Jewish Holocaust and all of a sudden, they're racist.

Jerry Wolfe: The attacks were, you know that these were insensitive, cold, heartless, mean spirited kids who had done this intentionally, who were children of the media and TV, and, you know, they've seen kids, people, blown away everyday so they don't have any feelings anymore.

(Letters to the local newspapers)

"Deplorable and insensitive behavior cannot be defended by invoking cultural ignorance.

"Ignorance is no excuse for behavior so deplorable. . .

"It's another example of black and Hispanic upbringing. . .

"These students are so numb to gunfire and death, that it's almost s second nature. . .

"I think King is turning over in his grave to see how appallingly minority students reacted to such a world historical tragedy."

David Hyams: Ignorance of an event doesn't preclude forming an opinion about it. I mean, the fact that they don't know anything about Judaism or anything, any particular facts about the Holocaust, certainly wouldn't preclude youths from having an opinion about Jews.

Interviewer: But do you conclude that they did have an opinion about Jews?

David Hyams: Yes. and that's my view that they did, that their opinion is framed by the underlying Black/Jewish conflict that has gone on for many years.

Girl at Oakland school board: Basically, I want to say that I think the media should apologize to Castlemont for setting a bad example for us and all of Oakland because they didn't deserve all that coverage.

Narration: At the Oakland School Board, students and parents were furious at being called insensitive and anti-Semitic. In response, some turned to old stereotypes about Jewish control of the media.

Girl student at school board: A lot of students didn't even know that the Holocaust was a true story. So, you're going to laugh if you weren't prepared for it correctly. But if you're going to blame somebody, you need to blame Hollywood, you need to blame the media, you need to blame TV. It's not us. and if you want some kind of justification for the Jewish people, don't come to Castlemont. Go to yourselves.

Jerry Wolfe: For me, it did put me in a situation where personally I really had to look at my own relationship to myself as a Jew and what it meant to me and what it meant to me in the past and some of my own issues and stereotypes. It really made me re-examine a lot of that.

Being a Jew is different than being White. Yes, I get a lot of privileges that come with being white. But there's a whole lot of other stuff that I've gone through, my parents have gone through, and my people have gone through because we're Jewish and they haven't been very wonderful things.

Castlemont Counselor Laura Abrams: I think the hardest part for me, as a Jewish person working there at that time, was kind of confronting daily this growing anti-Semitism or something that was created by the reaction to the incident. Like I never thought of the incident itself as being in any way anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic, but when people

would come up to me and say, "I have heard this and this about Jews, about Jews being the most racist group against African Americans," and you know other stuff, it was just very painful for me.

Cicely Hall: It was a African/Latino school, and I felt like our history was being pushed out the way for the Jewish Holocaust, which I have nothing against. I have nothing against the Jewish Holocaust. But I think we should understand our own pain before we can understand somebody else's pain. You know, if we don't understand our own pain, how we gonna understand your pain?

Castlemont Student Martha Calhoun: As far as learning about each other, yes, we can learn about each other. Nothin' wrong with that. But you gotta like you said you got to know yourself. and a lot of brothers up there and sisters don't know themselves like they should know themselves. And that may be a big problem in them wanting to know about other people. Because if you don't know yourself, when it comes to somebody else sharing their pain with you, you gone rub it off like, "What about me?"

(African dancing in the cafeteria of Castlemont High School)

Narration: As a result of the theater incident, Castlemont scheduled a special full-day teach-in on the African Holocaust, so that Black students could learn about their own history. School officials invited local Afrocentric scholars, youth psychologists and African American story tellers into the classrooms to teach about the slave trade, slavery, and the legacy of white supremacy.

Afrocentrist Professor Wade Nobles: ...who were lynched in this country, lynched, ropes tied around their necks and hung from trees for one hundred years.

Anisa Rasheed: It was a very powerful day, a very powerful day. and it was palpable. You could really sense that the kids really thinking, you know. and a lot of them didn't agree with everything that they heard, but really thinking about it, and really turning it over in their minds. and I can only say that the gamut of information was just incredible.

Wade Nobles: ...hung from trees. All these names. Black people. This is the Maafa. The reason why these people were killed was because this society deemed that African people were less than human.

Black storyteller Phavia Khujichagulia: and believe it or not there are 54 facets to racism. 54. Not 2, not 3, 54 facets to racism. The problem is most people don't know what racism is let alone that there are 54 aspects to it.

The psychological dimension: The psychological is very, very simple. Black is terrible. White is wonderful. Be very conscious of this. This whole society, its whole job is to make you feel bad about Black. Black-balled, what's that?

African Holocaust Day Male Speaker: The history of this camera is one type of history. The history of these books is one type of history. The history of a map is one type of history. All of these things have to add up because when we start talking about what the Holocaust is, this great destruction, this total destruction, we always think the Jewish Holocaust.

Martha Calhoun: Well, I was in one of those classes, and what they were talking about was basically a lot of the slave ships were owned by Jews, and he showed us documents from where he had gotten out of Washington D.C. that stated that. and to me, that laid an impression upon me.

Jerry Wolfe: I do know that I did very quickly hear about two of the presenters. and based on what I was told, I had some real concerns about what materials were presented. There were anti-Semitic things that came out during this. There were statements made by people that were clearly anti-Semitic. Not the kids.

Anisa Rasheed: It really, you know, out of 27 presenters and students, that two of the presenters raised some issues that even students challenged, you know.

Jerry Wolfe: You know, one way to phrase it is "presenters who raised some issues," and I might hear something as, wait a minute, there were some presenters who went in and made blatant anti-Semitic untrue statements to students and those are two very different statements.

And, to me, that's a responsibility line that we've gotta face. I'm not comfortable with just saying that someone raised some issues when they made these I, maybe what they said was in fact anti-Semitic and inaccurate, and that's a whole lot different than raising an issue. So, you know, I don't know.

Narration: Two weeks after "Schindler's List" swept the Academy Awards, director Steven Spielberg was on his way to Castlemont followed by a horde of media. California Governor Pete Wilson, facing an uphill re-election campaign, announced he would be there too.

Anisa Rasheed: I was one of the staff that was very against Steven Spielberg and Governor Wilson coming to Castlemont, and I vociferously opposed it. and I felt that the circus that was mounted for this visit was not good for the kids.

(Picket line and protesters outside Castlemont. Chants)

"Give the truth to the youth."

"Give the truth to the youth."

"Let's talk about the Black holocaust."

"Let's talk about the Black holocaust."

Female Castlemont Student: If he was here to give us money for our students on education about becoming filmmakers or something, we would be proud to have him here. But he's coming to teach us about his Holocaust. We don't even know about ours.

Maribel Corral: I think Spielberg, Steven Spielberg had our best interest at heart when he came and visited. But Pete Wilson, tagging along, had nothing at all to do with the issue of anti-Semitism in the schools... Another thing that was funny was how the week before Pete Wilson came, paint went up, toilet paper went in the bathrooms, everything... Things we hadn't seen.

Cicely Hall: Trash cans.

Maribel Corral: Trash cans at every bench.

Cicely Hall: My momma drove by Castlemont, my momma went like "Oh, they fixin' up Castlemont for Spielberg, huh?" I'm like "yeah." "They like cut the hedges and everything." I'm like, "yeah." Let him smell the urine. Let him see how mucked up the school is when he's not here. I was like this is just interesting to see all these people who don't care about Castlemont and probably will never care about Castlemont, just come up there for that one day.

(Auditorium at Castlemont High School as students file in)

Podium speaker: It's not important. Just have them take a seat, fill in every seat... Mr. Steven Spielberg and the Governor of the State of California. Stand up, ladies and gentlemen, the Governor of the State of California is in the building.

Maribel Corral: I saw KTVU, KPIX.

Martha Calhoun: I saw KGO. I saw CNN. You know, people....

Cicely Hall: Oh, goodness, can I go down the list? Channel 2, channel 4, channel 5, channel 7, CNN...

Maribel Corral: The Spanish channel.

Cicely Hall: Oh, I didn't know that. Um, channel 13, of course, since it was in Oakland.

Laura Abrams: I just thought there was about at least that day at least a hundred media outlets, at least.

California Governor Pete Wilson: We have a lot to learn from each other... both about our common experiences, those we share and about our differences. We have a lot to teach each other.

Anisa Rasheed: As the day progressed, people began to really see what was going on, that Castlemont High School, that students were being used by the media and by I guess Oakland School District, as some kind of staging area for the political gains of Pete Wilson.

Pete Wilson: Ladies and gentlemen, the students of Castlemont High School, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you a man who is helping, and who has accomplished great things for film, for education, and for tolerance, Mr. Steven Spielberg.

(applause)

Film Director Steven Spielberg: Thank you. I believe that Castlemont High School has received a very bad rap for what happened that day on Martin Luther King Day. and by the way, I was thrown out of "Ben Hur" when I was a kid for talking so... you know, I kind of know what that was like. I think we have to put this under the heading of "the privileges of youth."

Narration: The event was almost over. Everyone behaved. All that was left was the final question to Governor Wilson from Student Body President, Kandi Stewart.

Kandi Stewart: This is to Governor Wilson. I see your visit to Oakland, a city plagued with poverty from different views. I see it as a failing governor's publicity stunt that enables him (yells, applause) Wait a minute... that enables him to portray himself as a caring politician, embracing the poor and smothering them with empty promises, coincidentally close to election time, but I also see the entire political fiasco as an opportunity to vent the anger and the spite and the animosity I feel toward your entire time in office. I mean, I want to know, was your main purpose in portraying yourself through the streets of my city where you have cut welfare, education and many young futures like mine... (applause, cheers)

Pete Wilson: Well, I won't count on your vote. Let me just say that with all respect to the questioner, I could not more emphatically disagree with everything that you've said. Let me tell why...

Crowd: Why? Why?

Pete Wilson: Thank you.

Anisa Rasheed: You know, we're saying we're trying to build young leaders and we want our kids to be self-directed and self-spoken and dadda dadda da, and then when they do it, they come down on them. She was called into the principal's office all by herself and told that she didn't do the right thing. And that, to me, that's unfair... And to me that's what we should be fomenting in our kids not squashing... you know, but...

Narration: For the moment, the ritual had been disrupted. Kandi Stewart refused to play her part. Her words revealed how Black/Jewish conflict can divert attention from other problems facing American society. Jews and Blacks will continue to disagree on how to deal with some of those problems. The question is whether some Blacks and some Jews can face those differences and work together for common goals.

(Reading of "Purple and Black" story by author and Columbia Law Professor Patricia Williams)

Patricia Williams: One summer when I was about six, my family drove to Maine. My sister and I sat in the back seat of the Studebaker and argued about what color the road was. I said black, she said purple. After I had harangued her into admitting that it was indeed black, my father gently pointed out that my sister still saw it as purple. I was unimpressed with the relevance of that at the time; but with the passage of years, I have come to see endless highways as slightly more purple than black. My sister and I will probably argue about the hue of life's roads forever. But the lesson I learned from listening to her wild perceptions is that it really is possible to see things--even the most

concrete things--simultaneously yet differently; and that seeing simultaneously yet differently is more easily done by one, but that one person can get the hang of it with time and effort.

Credits