

Rustin

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felt would be most sensitive to any such manifestations.

We asked the American ambassador and his senior staff members if they had received complaints of racism from black Americans. The embassy staff indicated that it has not received a single such complaint in the almost four years the present ambassador had been in Israel.

Indeed, Ben-Ami Carter, the leader of the Black Hebrews, told us that he did not consider that his group's problems spring from official racism, although he did mention that he felt a few individuals in the neighboring area had exhibited racist attitudes. Other blacks, who live in or are visiting Israel, assure us that there was no official racism — so did two separate groups of blacks from Ethiopia.

The only instance we found of discrimination by color was the situation at Ben Gurion Airport. In an effort to prevent any more Black Hebrews from entering Israel illegally, Israeli officials had been subjecting blacks to special scrutiny. As our report noted, "At present, police officers are taking some black Americans from the passport control checkpoint line before they reach the immigration officer, obviously on the basis of color." Such treatment, our group felt, has to cease both because it is unfair and because it can be used by the enemies of Israel and of the Black-Jewish alliance. We feel that while this discrimination is obviously racial, it is not based on racist attitudes. And in response to our urgings, Yosef Burg, the Israeli Minister of the Interior, indicated that airport procedures would be changed and improved.

The problem of the Black Hebrews is complicated. The group has a highly authoritarian structure and a rigid ideology reminiscent of some religious groups in the U.S. In addition, as our report noted, the group's "self-proclaimed messianic vision includes their supplanting the present legal Israeli Jewish government" by divine

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intervention. In addition, we expressed our concern about the hardships which former members of the Black Hebrew Community are suffering because of their extralegal status in Israel.

Our group did not take sides, but sought simply to uncover the facts in this complicated matter which must, in the final analysis, be resolved by the government and people of Israel. We urged that the Israeli government act quickly and expeditiously in deciding the future of the Black Hebrews presently in Israel.

On the basis of our trip, I can assert with confidence that the status of the Black Hebrews with respect to housing and adequate medical care has improved in the last several years. Furthermore, if temporary work permits are issued to the Black Hebrews, pending a decision as to their ultimate status, their basic right to earn a living will be adequately protected.

Israel is an embattled country, surrounded by enemies. Yet its democratic traditions give us confidence that the matter of the Black Hebrews will be dealt with humanely. In the last several years, black-Jewish relations outside Israel have undergone substantial strain. Yet blacks and Jews are linked by a common history of oppression, and in the U.S., they have been closely linked in their joint struggle for civil and human rights.

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