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## EDITORIALS

# At the Corner of MLK Boulevard and Rosa Parks Place

## In Honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

COMEDIAN Chris Rock tells about receiving a call from white friends stuck with a flat tire on Martin Luther King Boulevard. What should they do? “Run!” he cries.

Most white Americans have taken his advice. Forty years after the assassination of Dr. King, there are now more than six hundred and eighty U.S. streets named in his honor, from New York to Atlanta, Chicago to Salt Lake City, Portland to Dallas, and “Rosa Parks” is embossed on street signs in a score more cities and towns — but there’s hardly a white pedestrian to be seen on most of these thoroughfares, which usually lie in the heart of African-American neighborhoods.

What’s seen instead are lots of very hard-working Black people worried about ballooning mortgages, gang violence, cops with anxious trigger fingers, and other dangers to their and their kids’ future. Often they live near empty, rubble-strewn lots, check-

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**Eighty percent of white people live in virtually all-white neighborhoods, with nearly nine in ten white suburbanites living in communities that are less than one percent Black.**

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cashing and payday loan stores, dilapidated public schools, and other monuments of discrimination. Often there are groups of men marooned on the corner by unemployment (9.5 percent, twice the rate for white men), poverty (25 percent, three times the white rate), and the rules of parole (African-American men are seven times more likely than white men to be incarcerated; all statistics from the National Urban League’s 2007 *State of Black America* report).

It’s good to have street signs that remind Black communities about yesterday’s inspiring civil rights leaders — but what about the rest of us? Eighty percent of white people live in virtually all-white neighborhoods, with nearly nine in ten white suburbanites living in communities that are less than one percent Black. What is there to remind them of the insight delivered by Dr. King at that historic 1963 March on Washington: that white people’s “destiny is tied up” with African-American destiny, and “their freedom is inextricably bound” to African-American freedom?

*Most white Americans instead run from King’s insight by underestimating the everyday impact of racism on people of color. In the wake of the ongoing noose case in Jena, Louisiana, for example, a CNN poll showed that only 47 percent of white respondents think that the criminal justice system discriminates*

## JEWIS IN SDS

“Out of all the uncountable hours of discussion in SDS meetings,” recalls Mark Rudd, a leader of Columbia’s SDS chapter during the 1968 campus strike, “. . . I don’t remember a single conversation in which we discussed the fact that so many of us were Jewish. This glaring lack alone might serve as a clue to what we were up to: by being radicals, we thought we could escape our Jewishness. Leftwing radicalism was internationalist, not narrow nationalist; it favored the oppressed and the workers, not the privileged and elites, which our families were striving toward. Moreover, we were New Leftists, having rejected the sectarianism and cant of the Old Left, which, of course, was dominated by Jews.” Nevertheless, “World War II and the Holocaust were our fixed reference points. . . . We often talked about the moral imperative not to be Good Germans. . . . We saw American racism as akin to German racism toward the Jews. . . . We were good Jewish kids, the cream of the crop, who had accepted the myths of America — democracy, opportunity for all, good intentions toward the world — and of the university — free and open inquiry toward the truth. We were betrayed by our country and the university when we learned, in a relative instant, that the reality wasn’t even close to these myths. We third-generation American Jews suddenly woke up and realized this country may have been a blessing for us, but not for so many others who couldn’t pass for white. I should add that non-Jewish friends and comrades in the New Left experienced very similar feelings of betrayal and outrage. . . .”

—www.markrudd.com

## RELIGIOSITY IN ISRAEL

As Israel enters into celebrations of its 60th year, recent estimates identify five percent of the Israeli Jewish population as ultra-Orthodox, 12 percent as ‘national religious’ (Orthodox), 35 percent ‘traditional’ (observant, not Orthodox), 43 percent secular, and five percent anti-religious secular.

—Church and State

## GAZA GASPING

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reports that 84.6 percent of Gazan households are now living below the poverty line, including, according to the World Bank, 71 percent of public employees. Nearly half do not have enough food to meet basic needs. The unemployment rate during the second quarter of 2007 increased from about 36 percent to about 50 percent; monthly wage income stands at \$38, which is 62.6 percent of the pre-September, 2000 level. About \$650 million in donor funds has been injected annually into Gaza from 2001-2007, with less than 5 percent going into the private sector.

—Palestine-Israel Journal

against Blacks, a view held by 79 percent of African Americans. Similarly, a 2001 survey showed that 40 to 60 percent of whites (depending on how the question was framed) considered the average African American to be doing as well as, or even better than, the average white. A 2006 survey reported in Harvard’s *Du Bois Review* ([www.fas.harvard.edu/~mrbworks/articles/2006\\_DUBOIS.pdf](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~mrbworks/articles/2006_DUBOIS.pdf)) showed a preponderance of whites of different ages and geographic regions saying they’d be willing to spend the rest of their lives as an African-American for ‘compensation’ of only \$10,000 — while requiring \$1 million to spend the rest of their lives without television! Such feedback reveals an utter lack of comprehension of the structural nature of American racism and how it penetrates African-American lives — an incomprehension cultivated by conservative political voices, both white and Black, that have assured us that the achievements of the civil rights movement should have been perfectly sufficient to bring healing and prosperity to a community assaulted for centuries by racial hatred and extreme exploitation, and that it is only the self-defeating social pathologies of ghetto life that block progress. Why believe otherwise when our million-dollar television sets an African-American judge on the bench in every other crime show? — plus there’s that gorgeous Beyoncé and that oh-so-wise Oprah and that smart-as-a-whip Condoleezza Rice. . . .

*Presumably, American Jews know better. We have known the difference between discrimination and equal opportunity in our own recent past. We have experienced how ghettoization produces heroism in some, parasitism in others. We have experienced the value of reparations and affirmative action. And we talk, read, and make rituals about the process of redemption from slavery every chance we get.*

Still, Jews have largely stopped visiting the corner of MLK Boulevard and Rosa Parks Place, even for annual synagogue-church get-togethers. Instead, we laugh ruefully with Chris Rock, and then spend our life savings on houses in neighborhoods with good, i.e., white-majority, school systems. (Former Congressional Representative Peter Deutsch has even launched a Hebrew-themed charter school in Florida and has plans to open a hundred such public schools across the country. Daniel Treiman recently critiqued the plan in the *Forward*: “It’s one thing. . . to opt out of the public school system; it’s another thing to cash out. It’s one thing to privilege your group’s private interests; it’s another to demand that government privilege those interests, as well.”)

*Among the rare exceptions to the rule of Jewish flight from involvement* with the African-American community are several organizations of the Jewish left (in a repeat of history — see Cheryl Lynn Greenberg’s article, “Leftists and the Civil Rights Movement,” on page 19 of this issue). In New York, for example, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) has made common cause since 2002 with Domestic Workers United, a coalition of nannies, house cleaners, and elderly care providers, the great majority of whom are people of color. In Chicago, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs has a long history of working with the city’s African-American community, dating back to the mayoral campaign of Harold Washington in 1982-’83. Nationally, the Jewish Funds for Justice has organized nearly a hundred synagogues into grassroots organizing coalitions since 2000, and has also catalyzed over \$30 million from Jewish Federations, synagogues, family foundations and other institutions as investments in community development financial institutions and community

Henry Foner

## FOR BETTER OR VERSE

### Portrait of a Political Hack

Here's to Rudy Giuliani,  
On political combat he thrives.  
He remembers the name of each foe that he's fought,  
But he can't recall all of his wives.

Here's to Rudy Giuliani,  
Whose integrity fades with the sun.  
The gun-toting lobby delights in his prose —  
They call him their son-of-a-gun.

Here's to Rudy Giuliani,  
Whose motives are pristine and pure.  
The thief he appointed to head up his police  
Is naught but a Kerik-a-ture.

Here's to Rudy Giuliani,  
And hark! whilst he tempers his voice.  
On Mondays and Fridays, 'twixt twelve hours and two,  
He proclaims he's for freedom of choice.

### L'Envoi

Here's to Rudy Giuliani,  
Whose virtues are scattered and few —  
If you give him some time and you wait long enough,  
He may wind up agreeing with you.

development corporations around the country. This money provides low-interest loans in minority communities for housing and jobs development — a strategy that the American Jewish community modeled in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through Hebrew Free Loan funds and other credit-providing institutions. Ultimately, the investing organizations get their capital back, along with a renewed appreciation of how Jewish identity can be cultivated to serve universalist goals.

Thirty million dollars, however, is less than one third of one percent of the combined assets of major American Jewish organizations — and the organizing work required to gain even that percentage for community development has stretched out for two decades. It seems that MLK Boulevard and Rosa Parks Place need rerouting, to the doors of our organizations, and to the center of our hearts. ■

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### THE FOOD STAMPS CHALLENGE

Pepi Dunay, director of community relations for the Jewish Federation of Broward County, and Debra Gober, community relations committee chairwoman for the Federation, each spent her days between Rosh Hashone and Yom Kippur trying to feed herself on a federal food stamps budget of \$3 per day — the average amount that twenty-six million Americans receive in federal food assistance. The women were responding to a call from the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, umbrella organization for more than a hundred Jewish community organizations, to mobilize support for the 2007 Farm Bill, passed by the House of Representatives in July but still stuck in the Senate — and facing a veto. The bill, which must be reauthorized every five years, includes provisions on environmental preservation, farm subsidies, and, since 1977, food stamps. Several lawmakers participated in the JCPA food stamps challenge, including the only Muslim member of Congress, U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN). —*Miami Herald*

### CENSORSHIP IN SACRAMENTO

*The Jewish Voice*, the newspaper owned by the Sacramento Jewish Federation, recently refused to run a simple calendar announcement for a book reading by Alice Rothchild, author of *Broken Promises, Broken Dreams: Stories of Jewish and Palestinian Trauma and Resilience* (briefly reviewed in our September-October issue, page 10). The event, said the editor, Elissa Provance, would not support the paper's mission to "enrich those of the Jewish community who support and identify with Israel." The decision was loudly protested by Jewish Voice for Peace, which is helping to sponsor Rothchild's book tour. She is an active member of the Workmen's Circle in Boston and her book, published by Pluto Press, focuses on activists and everyday people in the both the Israeli and Palestinian communities. —[www.muzzlewatch.com](http://www.muzzlewatch.com)

### DODGING THE IDF

One out of four eligible Israelis, 27.7 percent, evaded serving in the Israel Defense Force in 2007, according to its Manpower Branch. Half of them invoked their right to study in yeshiva; the rest had criminal records or medical problems. — *Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle*

### THE MOST FAMOUS HADASSAH LADY

Henrietta Szold (1860-1945), the founder of Hadassah, was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York, in October, 2007. The organization now has 300,000 members. — *Hadassah magazine*

### AMERICA BEHIND BARS

The U.S., with five percent of the world's population, now houses 25 percent of the world's prison inmates, with an incarceration rate 6.2 times that of Canada, 7.8 times that of France, 12.3 times that of Japan, and 40 percent higher than Russia's.

— *Utne Reader*