



'Wogs' and 'Kikes': the Jewish Tribune – West Indian World Controversy of 1978

Joseph Finlay

To cite this article: Joseph Finlay (2022) 'Wogs' and 'Kikes': the Jewish Tribune – West Indian World Controversy of 1978, *Jewish Culture and History*, 23:4, 403-415, DOI: [10.1080/1462169X.2022.2135859](https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2022.2135859)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2022.2135859>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 22 Oct 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 625



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



'Wogs' and 'Kikes': the Jewish Tribune – West Indian World Controversy of 1978

Joseph Finlay 

The Parkes Institute for the study of Jewish/non-Jewish relations, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK


ABSTRACT

In early 1978 a conflict emerged between the Orthodox Jewish newspaper Jewish Tribune and the Black British West Indian World. After Tribune published a seemingly offensive Yiddish language editorial cautioning against Jewish public solidarity with West Indians, it was leaked to West Indian World who splashed it on their front page. This article will give a full account of the largely forgotten affair, focusing on the responses to it in the Black and Jewish press and examining what it illustrates about Jewish responses to issues of race relations in late 1970s Britain.

KEYWORDS

Jewish; black; race; yiddish; national front; West Indian world; Jewish Tribune; Anti-Nazi league

The relationship between the Black and Jewish communities in modern Britain has attracted scant scholarly attention. While there is an extensive literature on 'Black-Jewish relations' in the United States, especially on the famed 'Black-Jewish alliance' of the early 1960s and its apparent breakdown at the end of that decade, and a much smaller body of work on the Jewish community in apartheid South Africa, little has been written on the situation in Britain in the 'race relations' era.¹ This is a significant lacuna; there is a significant history of both communal co-operation and conflict that needs to be written and which can contribute to our understandings of contemporary Jewish, Black and British identities. My research focuses on the Jewish side of the equation: how Jews responded to, were active in, and were affected by the politics of 'race' from the late 1950s until the turn of the millennium. While it would not be until the mid-1980s that newspaper articles would begin to depict Black-Jewish relations in Britain as in a state of conflict, this article describes a contested inter-communal incident that took place at the end of the 1970s, which caused significant antipathy, with Geoffrey Alderman describing it as 'the greatest self-inflicted *chillul hashem* (desecration of God's name) suffered by British Jewry for a generation'.² I will argue that the leaders of what I call the 'organised Jewish community' dealt poorly with the incident in question due to a number of factors: a lack of relationships with organisations representing other minority groups; an tendency to prioritise combatting fascist language over violent attacks and state discrimination; a paternalistic attitude that portrayed British Jewish assimilation as a 'success story' from

CONTACT Joseph Finlay  j.w.finlay@soton.ac.uk  The Parkes Institute for the study of Jewish/non-Jewish relations, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

which other minorities should learn; and a predisposition to attribute instances of Jewish prejudice to the 'communal fringe' without working seriously to overcome it.³

The context for the affair was the rise of the neo-fascist National Front; founded in 1967 it began to gain in popularity after John Tyndall gained the leadership in 1972 and participated to an unprecedented degree in the two general elections of 1974, standing 54 candidates in February and 90 in October. In 1975, after less success in local elections, Tyndall was replaced as chairman by former Conservative John Kingsley Read, who then, in December of that year, split from the NF to form the National Party. The NP went on to win two seats on Blackburn council in 1976, while the NF won none despite many candidates receiving 10%–20% of the vote.⁴ The fascist fringe was a serious concern for the organised Jewish community, and the Board of Deputies of British Jews put much energy into opposing it through propaganda, with other Jewish bodies such as the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen (AJEX) also taking a role. These bodies, and the Jewish-led anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*, put much emphasis on uncovering the antisemitism of the NF and other groups, such as the NP, drawing attention to the Nazi past of leaders such as Tyndall and showing how conspiratorial antisemitism was foundational to its ideology. In contrast, Anti-Black and Anti-Asian racism needed no uncovering: violence and incitement against these minorities, coupled with advocacy of compulsory repatriation, was at the heart of the neo-fascists' activities. This distinction proved an underlying source of tension between anti-fascists: while Black and Asian activists were focussed on fascist violence, Jewish anti-fascists were usually preoccupied with fascist literature and the conspiracy theories it contained. This difference of focus would play out in the affair under discussion.

In 1976, at a National Party meeting, Read gave a speech calling for compulsory repatriation of non-whites from Britain, and used the phrase 'niggers, wogs, and coons'. He also responded to the recent, racially motivated murder of a young Sikh man, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, in the streets of Southall by saying 'One down, one million to go'.⁵ Read was charged with inciting racial hatred under the 1976 Race Relations Act. While the case in his January 1978 trial appeared to activists to be clear-cut, Judge Neil McKinnon directed the jury towards a non-guilty verdict and Read was acquitted. In his summing-up remarks, McKinnon framed the case as one of freedom of speech, calling for 'toleration and freedom to the individual, otherwise we are all caught up in a vice of dictatorship, repression and slavery'.⁶ McKinnon interpreted the law narrowly, as only prohibiting speech that explicitly and directly called for a racial attack and suggested that it should not criminalise arguments for 'stemming immigration or advocating repatriation'. Most controversially, he ended with the phrase 'I wish you well'.⁷

The case caused outrage: a large number of Labour MPs signed an Early Day Motion condemning the judge, and *The Guardian* called it a 'bizarre decision',⁸ although Conservative parliamentarians used the principle of judicial independence to avoid criticising the Judge's comments.⁹ The Lord Chancellor, Lord Elwyn-Jones, rejected calls to sanction McKinnon, but made public the fact that McKinnon had asked not to be assigned any more cases involving issues of racism, a request that Elwyn-Jones said he had 'no doubt' would be granted.¹⁰ Also outraged by the case was the growing British Black press, in particular *West Indian World*.

A weekly newspaper, *West Indian World* had been founded by Saint Vincent-born editor Aubrey Baynes in 1971. At its inaugural reception Baynes said that it sought to

'promote multiculturalism and racial harmony by making the black community feel they belong in, and can be successful in Britain.'¹¹ The paper was taken over by Guyanese publisher and Editor Arif Ali in mid-1973 who oversaw a substantial growth in its readership.¹² Ali demonstrated interest in comparing Black and Jewish experience in one of his early editorials, proclaiming that 'we are not going to allow ourselves to be forcefully repatriated without a fight. We will not be like the poor Jews of Dachau ... But we will be like the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto ... their willingness to fight and be destroyed fighting rather than die on their knees is one of the most glorious episodes in the history of the human race.'¹³ Ali, who would later go on to found a string of ethnic newspapers through his company Hansib publications – *Caribbean Times*, *Asian Times* and *African Times* – was in turn dethroned in a staff coup in 1976 and control passed to a staff co-operative, under the editorship of Tony Douglas. The paper survived until 1985, becoming the longest running Black newspaper in Britain, superseded by *The Voice* (1982-). In the late 1970s, the paper carried a diverse mix of the international and the local: news from the Caribbean islands with particular focus on Jamaica; allegations of discrimination in clubs and music venues; scantily clad female models and advertisements for Black hairdressers, Community Relations jobs and Caribbean travel agents.

West Indian World covered the Kingsley Read case extensively over a number of editions, with an editorial proclaiming: 'A more blatant exercise in racialist utterance one cannot find ... McKinnon's words, coming from the artificial eminence that judicial quotes enjoy, are perhaps the most devastating exhortation yet to racial violence in the streets of England!'¹⁴ The paper's consistent focus was not Kingsley Read's acquittal but McKinnon's apparent support of him and the failure of Attorney General Sam Silkin (who was Jewish, the son of Baron Lewis Silkin, although the paper did not mention this) to sack him. It supported a call by the Standing Conference of Pakistani Organisation for Black lawyers to refuse to appear in any future cases judged by him.¹⁵ The paper reported strong criticism of McKinnon from a number of groups representing ethnic and religious minorities: Camden Community Relations Council, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the West Indian Standing Council and the Catholic Commission for Racial Justice.¹⁶ There were no Jewish groups quoted here; while the organised Jewish community was more than willing to speak out against fascist groups, to condemn a high court judge would have been viewed as unacceptably political.

Although there was no Jewish element to the story, in an editorial two weeks later, *West Indian World* drew a comparison between the social position of the Black and Jewish communities in Britain:

Unlike the Jewish people, whose economic strength is well respected even by the racists, the vulnerability of the Black people in the United Kingdom lay in our weakness to establish a strong and united base.¹⁷

Here, and elsewhere, the Black press noted the social privilege beginning to be enjoyed by British Jews who had been becoming steadily more middle-class in the post-war decades and portrayed it as a model to be emulated.

The case was covered in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the leading newspaper of the British Jewish community which dated back to 1841 and which styled itself 'the organ of Anglo-Jewry'.¹⁸ Writing in the immediate aftermath of the ruling, the *JC* took a strongly critical stance, and did not hesitate to draw a comparison between anti-Black and anti-

Jewish rhetoric saying: 'If "Niggers, wogs and coons" are legitimate adjectives "Yids, sheenies and kikes" must also be acceptable'. It went on to question how minorities could have faith in the legal system given such a ruling: 'As things stand, no black or brown defendant could reasonably be expected to be happy before a judge who said "I wish you well" to a man who dismissed the murder of an Asian youth with the words: "One down, a million to go."¹⁹ Chaim Bermant, writing under his Ben Azai pseudonym, was equally concerned by McKinnon's summary, but sounded a note of caution, pointing out that 'At an earlier hearing on the same charge in which Judge McKinnon did not preside, the jury failed to agree on a verdict (hence the retrial) which does suggest that in some respects the legislation on the subject is well ahead of public opinion and it would not help race relations if the many individuals and groups who feel outraged by the acquittal of Kingsley Read, were to force the resignation of Judge McKinnon'. Bermant urged caution lest overly zealous anti-racist campaigning have the unintended effect of increasing racist sentiment, out of sympathy with racists who are targeted by anti-discrimination laws. Whilst Bermant was by no means always consistent in what he advocated for Jews and for other minorities, in this case his concern is echoed by his other writings in which he urged Jews not to focus excessively on antisemitism.²⁰

Bermant's carefully phrased caution caused no controversy. The source of the argument that flared was the coverage of the affair in the Ultra-Orthodox Newspaper *Jewish Tribune*, read by strictly observant Orthodox Jews in Stamford Hill, Manchester and Gateshead, which styled itself the 'Organ of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy'. *Tribune*, a fortnightly newspaper, began publishing in 1962 as a successor to the *Jewish Weekly*, and was founded in response to the *Jewish Chronicle's* support for the progressive theology of Rabbi Louis Jacobs.²¹ It contained a mix of international news, particularly related to Israel, with rabbinic *drashot* (sermons) and advertisements for kosher shops, charity fundraising events, concerts by visiting children's choirs and a Hebrew crossword. In its focus on the everyday needs and interests of a very specific localised community it was remarkably similar to *West Indian World*.

The Ultra-Orthodox community represented by *Tribune* had been growing in Britain in the post-war period, following Jewish immigration from Germany and Austria in the 1930s and later from Hungary after the events of 1956; particularly influential were a number of immigrant *dayanim* (religious judges) who were appointed to the *batei din* (religious courts) of London and Manchester. The Hungarian wave also led to a situation in which Hungarian *chassidic* (mystical, rabbinic dynasty led) tendencies became ascendant over Lithuanian *misnagdic* (intellectual, anti-mystical) ones.²² While secular Yiddish was rapidly dwindling in 1970s Britain it was a language of everyday life for Chassidic communities, and as such *Tribune* included a short Yiddish section as well as an English one. As we will see, the newspaper took advantage of this to print different content in different languages, and the two sections were seemingly edited by different individuals. It is relevant to understand the affair that the primary organisation representing the Ultra-Orthodox, the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (UOHC) was no longer represented by the Board of Deputies, having left in 1971 in protest against the latter granting consultative status to the religious leaders of the Reform and Liberal denominations.²³ In 1977, Sigbert Prais of the Board of Deputies' Community Research Unit suggested that it was 'now more justifiable to speak of the polarisation of the community ... in terms of two nations

following very different patterns of lives rather than, as previously, of a single way of life for members of the community'.²⁴ In other words, the idea of a unified Jewish community that might have relations with other groups was already a fiction, if it had ever truly existed.

On 20 January 1978, *Tribune* covered the story, with a progressive English editorial calling for McKinnon to apologise and giving a condemnation of racism that was more thoroughgoing than that of the *Jewish Chronicle*: 'Racialism – subtle or overt – has been the greatest social evil of all time. It has caused the bloodiest wars in history and claimed millions of innocent lives the world over. It must therefore be eradicated whether it appears on a Hyde Park soap box or in the Law Courts.'²⁵ An editorial in the paper's Yiddish section, however, took a very different direction. After an initial declaration of the shared experiences of Blacks and Jews ('We Jews have always suffered from racial hatred and we understand the feelings of Black people about the judge's words') the editorial went on to draw distinctions between the position of the two communities, being particularly critical of the prominent Jewish Labour MP (and senior Vice President of the Board of Deputies) Greville Janner, who had protested against Judge McKinnon in parliament:

We must take the opportunity to repeat our view that for Jewish society do-gooders from every side of the community to take a side in the opening act of the immigration conflict in society is not right . . . From a practical standpoint it is clear that Black people display the same hatred of Jews as the white antisemites. This is a fact which has been detected by the Jews of America and is gradually becoming clear in England. The hatred directed against Blacks comes not only from the 'National Front' but from almost all white people over the whole country, and an identification of Jews with Black people, as suggested by Mr Janner and his friends, is a sure path to greater hatred of Jews from white people. Showing sympathy to Black people is perhaps a principle, but is that principle so pure and important to risk threatening the security of the Jewish community? The Blacks hate us Jews, just like our white enemies. The principle that the do-gooders talk about is only a political one, and we have no doubt in saying that it is a false principle. The do-gooders have no right to endanger the Jewish community for a political principle.²⁶

This was an extremely frank discussion of Jewish self-interest and was more honest about white gentile racism than non-Orthodox Jewish sources in the period, who were still keen to appeal to the better nature of the British public. Its suggestion of widespread Black hatred of Jews was not supported by anything in the Black press of the period; even texts which were later viewed as antisemitic, such as Rudy Narayan's *Black England* (1977), combined conspiratorial language with admiration for Jews, treating them as a model which Black Britons ought to follow.²⁷ *Tribune's* analysis – that visible Jewish participation in anti-racist activism could lead to a new wave of racialisation against Jews – was not so outlandish, and was a view that organised community leaders in the period sometimes implied, though avoided putting into print.

The frankness of *Tribune's* editorial was surely made possible by it being written in Yiddish, a language understood by few non-Jews, and thus *Tribune* could have reasonably assumed its content would reach only the paper's Ultra-Orthodox readers. This had been the case a few months prior when the paper had published an editorial along similar lines – 'Of course it is morally right to defend the persecuted Black population but not at the expense of the Jewish population which has been flung into the front line of an antisemitic war' – which had attracted no wider comment.²⁸

The reception on this occasion, however, turned out to be very different; the editorial was translated, and leaked to *West Indian World*. The identity of the individual who did this remains unknown. Presumably this was done by a *Tribune* reader who was offended by the attitudes displayed by the paper, and perhaps by racism in the Orthodox community more generally and wanted to expose them. Or perhaps, on the contrary, the leak was designed to worsen Black-Jewish relations, in which case it succeeded.

West Indian World splashed the story on its front page with the headline 'Jews in "Wogs Row".²⁹ The headline was far more inflammatory than anything in the article, and was misleading, as nowhere had *Tribune* use the word 'Wogs' in the Yiddish text, only '*Schvartzer Bafelkerung*', which translates as 'Black population' or 'Black community'. Perhaps the confusion arose because the term '*Schvartzer*', when used in English, was by then widely recognised as a racial slur.³⁰ Elsewhere *Jewish Tribune* used '*Vayse Bafelkerung*' and '*Yiddishe Bafelkerung*' to refer to the white and Jewish communities respectively. *Tribune* had only used the term 'Wogs' in its English editorial, when directly quoting Judge McKinnon. *West Indian World* gave the coverage a graphic representation by printing most of the editorial in Yiddish, describing it erroneously as 'The Editorial in Hebrew'.

West Indian's World's editorial was calm but critical:

The Black community does not need the sympathy of the Jewish community in their present struggle against the overwhelming odds we are facing from almost all quarters of this society. But what the Jewish people should remember is that at one time their community was placed in the same vulnerable position that we are presently in today. The strategy of the National Front is to attack the most vulnerable community, but when they are finished with us they shall be directing their racist attacks against their most fervent enemy, the Jewish people. What the Jewish people should also remember, is the fact that thousands of Black soldiers fought and dies [sic] for their right to survive and exist as human beings, in Hitler's Germany, and while we do not expect to be assisted by the Jews in our battle against the Front, we do not feel that the comments made by the Jewish Tribune brings any tears to the eyes of the Black Community.³¹

It is clear from this text that the Editors of *West Indian World*, part of a community that experienced racism from all directions, expected no special favours from the Jewish community, and thus did not feel especially let down. There were no appeals to any kind of a 'historic alliance', like the much discussed one between Blacks and Jews in 1950s and 1960s America. Instead, the editorial sought to remind Jews of the role of Black colonial soldiers in defeating Nazism, an implicit request for some reciprocity, and appealed to Jewish self-interest by arguing that the National Front's preoccupation with Blacks, rather than Jews, was only a temporary state of affairs.

Tribune's only response to *West Indian World's* coverage was a short English column under the 'Ben Yitzhok' pseudonym noting that 'My colleague and friend, the leader-writer of our Yiddish section has landed himself in the news again ... We have to be taught by no one that all men – irrespective of creed and colour – are G-d's creation and that all extremist political philosophies which deny basic human rights and freedom are abhorrent to fundamental Jewish teachings.'³²

The leaders of the organised Jewish community were far less measured. A slew of letters was published in *West Indian World* from prominent Jewish individuals and organisations, all of whom were outraged that the paper had failed to recognise that

Jewish Tribune represented only a ‘fringe’ Jewish position rather than the communal position. The letter writers clearly expected *West Indian World* to have a deep knowledge of the inner working of the Jewish community, a knowledge that few of them seemed to have of the West Indian population and its organisations. *Jewish Chronicle* Editor Geoffrey Paul thundered:

I am sorry that you have taken a Yiddish (not Hebrew) comment from a small publication of small circulation and presented it to your readers . . . as if it reflected the views of the Anglo-Jewish community. Had you cared to consult the columns of the JEWISH CHRONICLE the oldest and most prestigious of Anglo-Jewish publications, you would have seen that we have long held – and vigorously expressed – the view that we are all in this battle against the National Front together This – and not the comment you published – truly reflects the view of Anglo-Jewish leadership as it has been expressed in our columns.³³

Lawrie Nerva of the Board of Deputies Defence and Group Committee, and also a member of Brent Community Relations Council was equally irate:

I am horrified that your front page article purports to indicate that the views expressed in the editorial of the North London Jewish Tribune are reflective of the majority of Jews in this country would it not have been beneficial to the cause of fighting the National Front and the rising tide of racialism if your leader had sought to bring together the forces fighting discrimination rather than sharpening their differences I believe it is imperative that to restore a proper balance to your readership that [sic] you give prominent space in your newspaper to the following statement issued by the Board of Deputies.³⁴

The aforementioned statement, which *West Indian World* printed in full, included the claim that ‘My committee has offered the help of Jewish communities throughout the country to combat racialism, to meet leaders of the Asian and West Indian communities and I have already spoken to many of them’. It also demonstrated the widespread Jewish communal belief that Jews had become a successful minority that could teach more recent immigrant groups: ‘We feel no wish to patronise them, but we feel that with our expertise in achieving successful integration we have very much to contribute.’³⁵

Greville Janner, who had been the main recipient of Tribune’s criticism, was no less furious with *West Indian World’s* decision to publish the report:

I was astonished by the prominence which you saw fit to give the attack made upon me with a minute circulation within the Jewish community . . . I can assure you that my approach to and loathing of bigotry of any kind is shared by the vast majority of Jewish people In future, may I respectfully suggest that it would help good relations if you emphasised the vast common ground between us – rather than putting out eccentric views of a small minority I suggest that you accept from me the total commitment of our community and of its representative body that when the National Front attacks one minority group, it threatens all the rest.³⁶

West Indian World also gave space to a large article by Jacob Gewirtz, director of the Board of Deputies’ Defence and Group Relations department, entitled ‘The National Front: The Blacks and the Jews’.³⁷ This began with an account of two Jews who were murdered while registering African-American voters in Mississippi in 1964, thus grounding the British situation in the history of the US civil rights movement and emphasising that some Jews (albeit a very small number) had suffered whilst campaigning for Black rights. Gewirtz argued that ‘close ties between Jews and Blacks’ were natural due to a shared

history of persecution before acknowledging both 'Black antisemitism' and that 'some Jews harbour the irrational prejudices of Whites against Blacks.' Gewirtz relayed that he had 'sometimes heard misguided Jews say, "thank Heavens there are blacks in this country, otherwise we should be the victims."' Gewirtz then castigated not *Jewish Tribune* but *West Indian World*, saying that it had fallen into the same trap 'when it warned Jews that they were next on the list (after the Blacks) if and when the National Front were to take over the country.' The rest of the article drew on Gewirtz' library of anti-NF propaganda and argued that it was not 'within the capabilities of the ethnic minorities alone to defeat the National Front . . . we must carry the great mass of British people with us. It is, after all, their battle as much as ours.' This tallied with Gewirtz, and the Board's, desire to not make anti-fascism a specifically Jewish (and here a specifically ethnic minority) project, but rather make it a national one, grounded in British patriotism and the memory of the Second World War. Missing was any attempt to persuade the Black community rather than simply castigate them; an appeal to the contribution of West Indian conscripts to Britain's war victory might have been effective, even if any discussion of anti-colonialism would have been far outside Gewirtz' comfort zone. Gewirtz argued that it was a tactical error to portray the NF as an anti-immigrant party, for this was what they wanted, but given that West Indians were in the direct line of fire of calls for repatriation, expecting them to play this down in favour of an anti-authoritarian anti-fascism was hardly reasonable.

The volume and tone of the Jewish responses overall revealed similar missed opportunities and examples of misplaced anger. They displayed exasperation and outrage, not at the National Front, but at *West Indian World*, for covering the story. The binary distinction between 'fringe' and 'mainstream' which the Board of Deputies utilised was not a description of sociological reality but rather an articulation of how the major communal organisations wished reality to be. It was hardly reasonable to expect others to adopt such an analysis, after all *Tribune* had a readership of several thousand, and was a genuine news outlet for the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. Communal figures like Paul and Janner were deeply invested in defending the public image of the 'mainstream' community, to the extent that they invested time and energy in writing to *West Indian World*. (This concern was not new – it was evident in the Board's wounded complaints after it was criticised for 'insufficient institutional investment' in race relations work in the landmark report *Colours of Citizenship* in 1968).³⁸ The dialogue was largely one way – there is no parallel example of leading members of the Black community writing to the *Jewish Chronicle* in this period. The letters also demonstrated a lack of diplomacy – Janner talked of the 'vast common ground' between the two communities but the letters failed to reach out to the West Indian community, or to utilise language that might have offered specific solidarity on issues of racism they faced in relation to the police, social services and immigration authorities. To do so, however, would have required a Jewish communal consensus on those issues that did not exist – to engage in such territory would have been to venture into 'politics', something which institutions like the Board and the Chief Rabbinate claimed not to do. In a contemporary event Keith Joseph had travelled to Ilford during a by-election to rally Jews for the Conservative candidate around an anti-immigrant platform. Condemnation of Joseph from the leaders of organised community came not from a defence of immigration but rather from an accusation that he had attempted to 'politicise' the Jewish community.³⁹

The condemnation of *Tribune's* editorial was also disingenuous. It was hardly a racist text – it spoke of Black antisemitism, but discussion of that in Jewish circles had been widespread ever since the controversies surrounding the New York Teachers strike of 1968, and the Board of Deputies 1969 Race Relations pamphlet had devoted a page to the topic. The main cause for controversy was the editorial's unequivocal claim that if Jewish communal representatives engaged in broader anti-racist campaigning it would put the Jewish community at risk. This argument was not entirely unreasonable: the common trope utilised by the National Front and other fascist groups that Jews were masterminding mass immigration from New Commonwealth countries is evidence for this risk; were Jews to have been actively involved in anti-racism such (false) claims would have appeared more justifiable. The perceptions of (most) British Jews as white and unthreatening was a relatively recent development and dependent on the assumption that Jews were no longer immigrating to Britain in large numbers and were also rapidly assimilating; public communal involvement in 'pro-immigration politics' could have shifted that dynamic. If British Jews enjoyed an improved position in society since the 1960s and were less likely to be racialized or be the primary targets of the far right, then this had come about in part due to the widespread anxiety due to Britain's enlarged Black and Asian population; for Jewish communal organisations to engage in substantial public defence of Blacks and Asians risked blurring that hard-earned separation in public opinion.⁴⁰ Indeed, the Board of Deputies' reluctance to engage in activism against the National Front in the late 1970s if that involved sharing a platform with the far left could be understood as a further iteration of this communal reticence. *Tribune's* mistake, for which it had to be condemned, was to allow a deeply felt but private discourse to be put into print, damaging the idealised, apolitical vision of the community that figures like Janner and Paul sought to present.

The fact that the Ultra-Orthodox community, being itself a 'visible minority', due to its distinct dress codes, was at greater risk of being racialised than other parts of the Jewish community, was never discussed. The tendency to live in inner city areas, such as Hackney, meant that the Ultra-Orthodox probably had more contact with Blacks and Asians than suburban-dwelling Jews from the more centrist parts of the community. A classified advert in *West Indian World* a year later gives a hint of multi-ethnic relations that went beyond the headlines:

Unselfish Persons. A Multi-racial organisation based in Stamford Hill, North London is looking for kind, unselfish persons who wish to make people happy. Interested persons can write to Rabbi Henri Brand, 33 Leweston Place N16.⁴¹

While the *Jewish Tribune-West Indian World* affair was not discussed by either the Black or Jewish press after it occurred, it was part of a wider set of events which left a lasting impact. It contributed to new mistrust between Jewish and Black organisations; while there was a nebulous relationship between Board of Deputies and the West Indian Standing Conference, one of the oldest and most conservative Black organisations in Britain (founded in 1958), this resulted in few meetings and no concrete outcomes. The organised Jewish community in 1978 didn't prioritise relationships with Blacks and Asians, and when conflicts like this did flare, their attempts to deal with them came from a place of outrage and condescension, rather than one of solidarity between two racialised minorities. The affair also occurred in the midst of the meteoric rise of the Thatcherite

'new right' – to which Jewish Conservative intellectuals such as Keith Joseph and Alfred Sherman played an important role – which was increasingly trying to gain votes from the National Front by taking a hard-line stance on immigration. This was particularly notable in Margaret Thatcher's January 1978 *World in Action* where she claimed that 'people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture' – comments that Sherman claimed to have drafted.⁴² This new political climate which would lead to the Conservative victory in May 1979, positioned Jews – as a newly favoured 'model minority'- on the opposite side of the political divide from Blacks and Asians, who were portrayed as a threat to the homogeneity of the British nation. This context inevitably worsened relationships between Jews and other minorities. Also contemporary to the affair was the rise of the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), launched in November 1977, and the large-scale events organised by Rock Against Racism (RAR) in April and September 1978 in co-operation with the League. This posed great difficulties for the organised Jewish community, particularly the Board of Deputies, who avoided co-operating with the ANL due to its close links with the anti-Zionist Socialist Workers Party. The alternative, centrist Joint Campaign Against Racism, to which the Board affiliated, proved far smaller and less effective. The issue was highly controversial amongst British Jews and the *Jewish Chronicle* declared in October 1978 that no other issue had 'so divided Jewish public opinion as the argument for and against supporting the Anti-Nazi League campaign against the National Front.'⁴³ The Board's effective boycott of the ANL left the organised Jewish community outside the tent of the largest anti-racist movement of the moment, despite the presence of a significant number of Jews in the ANL's leadership such as the actress Miriam Karlin.⁴⁴ A range of Black and Asian community groups such as the Indian Workers Association and the Federation of Bangladeshi Organisations were affiliated to the ANL, as well as many individuals from minority backgrounds, and the Board of Deputies' absence from it was yet another factor contributing to suspicion and separation between the organised Jewish community and Black and Asian-led anti-racist bodies.⁴⁵

The issue of how West Indian publications portrayed Jews remained an issue of concern to the organised Jewish community. Later in 1978 Geoffrey Alderman attracted enormous communal ire by drawing attention to the very small number of Jews who supported the National Front, some of whom stood as electoral candidates for the party.⁴⁶ In response, *Pioneer News*, a smaller Black publication, published the headline 'Jews admit links with NF – no solidarity with blacks'.⁴⁷ At a meeting of the Defence and Group Relations Committee, Martin Savitt accused Alderman of making:

unsubstantiated allegations that are not only widely exaggerated but have created suspicion amongst the black and brown community that Jews would rather support the Nation Front, than support a multi-racial community. Much of the work of building good community relations is likely to be destroyed by these unfounded allegations of this one man. I hope that our dear friends on the West Indian and the Asian Communities will not take any notice of the slur upon our community but will accept from this Board today, our determination to combat and maintain our programme of work and to combat the activities of the National Front and other Extremist groups who use race hatred in their efforts to achieve political power.⁴⁸

Savitt's impassioned response indicates that the Board of Deputies was learning the lessons of the earlier affair and was becoming aware that Black and Asian perceptions

of the Jewish community's attitude to racism were important in creating improved 'community relations'. The Jewish Social Responsibility Council had been founded in Leeds in 1976 and in June 1978 it held a large scale 'West-Indian Jewish evening' that attracted 500–600 people, with around half from each community, and the Board's Martin Savitt was amongst the speakers.⁴⁹ In September 1979, the Manchester branch of the council held a Passover Seder for Jewish and West Indian teenagers.⁵⁰ But following the May 1979 election, and the failure of the National Front to make a breakthrough (achieving 0.6% and no seats) the organised Jewish community ceased to treat inter-communal relations as a priority, focusing instead on campaigning against British recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and for the emigration rights of Soviet Jews. In the 1980s, it was groups in conflict with the organised Jewish community that would be most active in anti-racism and inter-minority partnership, particularly the Jewish Socialist Group and its spin-off the Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project. There were some attempts at bridge building and education in the late 1980s after a series of crises, but not until the 1990s, after the British National Party had begun to enjoy a degree of electoral success, did the organised Jewish community seriously engage with the world of organised anti-racism through its co-operation with Marc Wadsworth's Anti-Racist Alliance and the creation of a Black-Jewish Forum by the Jewish Council for Racial Equality (the successor to the Jewish Social Responsibility Council). A new generation of Jewish communal leaders and a new willingness to accept the politics of multiculturalism created a changed climate for inter-minority co-operation and partnership.

The *Tribune-West Indian World* Controversy was a microcosm of conflicts between British Jews and other minorities in the late 1970s and 1980s, and contains themes that were reiterated on a number of occasions; a lack of inter-minority institutional relationships; a tendency to hector representatives of other groups rather than attempt to persuade them; a belief that other groups needed to learn the lessons of Jewish assimilation into British society; a desire to preserve the centrist, apolitical image of the Jewish community at all cost; and what Michael Rothberg has termed 'competitive memory' in relation to which histories needed to be prioritised and how.⁵¹ The great irony was that throughout the late 1970s and 1980s the roles that had been laid out in Jewish communal responses to the *Tribune-West Indian World* controversy became reversed; it was not the 'mainstream' community who led the way in building relations with Black and Asian groups and challenging state racism; that role was taken by its rival, the much-maligned Jewish communal 'fringe'.

Notes

1. Relatively recent scholarship on relations in the US includes Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Harvard University Press, 2009), Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton University Press, 2010) and Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s*, (Brandeis University Press, 2018). On Jews in Apartheid South Africa see Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa* (Lebanon NH: UPNE, 2003). The fullest discussion of the situation in Britain can be found in the final chapter of Gemma Romain, *Connecting Histories: A Comparative Exploration of African-Caribbean and Jewish History and Memory in Modern Britain* (London: Kegan Paul, 2006); see also Gavin Schaffer, 'Race and Colour Revisited: White Immigrants in Post-War Britain', in *Migrant Britain*, ed. Craig-Norton, Hoffmann and Kushner (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018). An

- important recent contribution was made in a special issue of *Jewish Culture and History* 20:3 (2019), albeit focused on Black-Jewish interactions in literature and film rather than history and primarily since the millennium.
2. Geoffrey Alderman 'A Tribute to Tribune's Lost World' *Jewish Chronicle* 3 September 2010 p.37. See Geoffrey Alderman, *London Jewry and London Politics 1889–1986* (London: Routledge, 1989) pp.119–123 for a brief account of the affair upon which this article substantially expands.
 3. By 'the organised Jewish community' I refer to the individuals and bodies who sought to represent British Jews to the outside world, particularly the Board of Deputies of British Jews but also the Chief Rabbinate, the United Synagogue and Union of Jewish Students amongst others. The phrase serves as a more neutral alternative to either 'the Jewish communal leadership' or 'the Jewish establishment'.
 4. Martin Walker, *The National Front* (London: Fontana, 1977) p.198; Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000) p.122.
 5. British Judge Backs Right to Air Race Views, Stirring Bitter Debate, *New York Times* 13 January 1978 <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/13/archives/british-judge-backs-right-to-air-race-views-stirring-bitter-debate.html> (Accessed 26/07/19).
 6. Cram, Ian. *Contested Words: Legal Restrictions on Freedom of Speech in Liberal Democracies* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.106.
 7. *New York Times* 13 January 1978.
 8. Ibid.
 9. Hansard HC Deb 11 January 1978 vol 941 cc1668-71, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1978/jan/11/judge-neil-mckinnon-early-day-motion>. Accessed 26/07/19.
 10. British Official Refuses to Punish Judge on Racism. *New York Times* 14 January 1978 <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/14/archives/british-official-refuses-to-punish-judge-on-racism.html> (accessed 1/09/22).
 11. Lionel Morrison, *A Century of Black Journalism in Britain: A Kaleidoscopic View of Race and the Media* (London: Truebay Limited, 2007) p.33.
 12. Asher and Martin Hoyles, *Caribbean Publishing in Britain: A Tribute to Arif Ali* (London: Hansib Publications, 2011) pp.118–121.
 13. Ibid p.119.
 14. *West Indian World* No. 338 January 13th –19th 1978 p.2.
 15. Ibid p.1.
 16. *West Indian World* no. 340 Jan 27th to 2 February 1978 p.6.
 17. Ibid p.2.
 18. For a history of the paper see David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo Jewry 1841–1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
 19. 'An Offence'. Editorial, *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 January 1978 p.18.
 20. See Bermant, Chaim. *Troubled Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).
 21. Geoffrey Alderman 2010. On the Louis Jacobs affair see Harry Freedman, *Reason to Believe: The Controversial Life of Rabbi Louis Jacobs* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).
 22. Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p.364; Miri Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain Since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken* (London OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006) p.117.
 23. Geoffrey Alderman, *Controversy and Crisis: Studies in the History of Jews in Modern Britain: Studies in the History of the Jews in Modern Britain* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008) p.17.
 24. Quoted in Miri Freud-Kandel 2006 p.182.
 25. 'An Obscure Compromise' *Jewish Tribune* 20 January 1978 p.4.
 26. 'Mir Un Rasn Hass' (Us and Race Hatred), *Jewish Tribune*, 20 January 1978 (My translation) Yiddish Tribune p. ג.
 27. Rudy Narayan, *Black England* (London: Doscarla Publications, 1977).
 28. 'Di Gefar fun Antisemitism' (The Danger From Antisemitism) *Jewish Tribune* 18 November 1977 (My translation) Yiddish Tribune p. ג.
 29. *West Indian World* Issue 341, Feb 3–9th 1978, p.1.

30. In 1984 Jacob Gewirtz wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle* to clarify that his use of it at a conference had been purely 'to rebuke those who spoke of blacks in those terms.' See 'The Damage Caused by A Slur' *Jewish Chronicle* 3 August 1984 p.16.
31. *West Indian World* Issue 341, Feb 3–9th 1978 p.2
32. 'In the News' *Jewish Tribune* 10 February 1978 p.4.
33. Letters, *West Indian World* 343 17–23 February 1978 p.7.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid p.6.
36. Letters, *West Indian World* 344, February 24th – 3 March 1978 p.6.
37. Ibid p.8–9.
38. 'Comments on Race Relations Report – for Jewish Chronicle 15/6/69' LMA ACC/3121/E/04/0289.
39. See 'Storm over "Jewish Vote" Call' *Jewish Chronicle* 24 February 1978 p.44.
40. See Gavin Schaffer 'You Don't Cure a Problem by Sweeping it Under the Carpet: Jews, Sitcoms and Race Relations in 1960s Britain' in *Hidden in Plain Sight: Jews and Jewishness in British Film, Television and Popular Culture* ed. Abrams (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016)
41. *West Indian World*, Issue 390 12–18 January 1979 p.11.
42. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485> (accessed 7/10/2022); Email correspondence with Geoffrey Alderman 27 October 2019.
43. 'Against The Front' *Jewish Chronicle* 27 October 1978 p.20.
44. See Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (Basingstoke: Red Globe Press, 2014) pp.440–441 for a list of Jewish ANL leaders and activists.
45. For an account of the ANL and RAR see David Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976–1982*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 2018).
46. See Geoffrey Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p.165–8.
47. 'Board Clash on Front Links' *Jewish Chronicle* 13 October 1978 p.13. The original article from *Pioneer News* is unavailable.
48. Defence and Group Relations Committee minutes 8 October 1978 LMA ACC/3121/A/051.
49. 'Togetherness Proves a Great Success' *Jewish Chronicle* 30 June 1978; 'Big Success for Joint Venture' *Jewish Chronicle* 26 October 1979.
50. *Jewish Telegraph* 11 April 1979, p.4.
51. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Joseph Finlay is a history PhD candidate at the University of Southampton, supervised by Professor Tony Kushner and Associate Professor Devorah Baum. His research focuses on Jewish responses to issues of race relations in post-war Britain from the late 1950s to the end of the twentieth century.

ORCID

Joseph Finlay  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3749-174X>