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CROWN HEIGHTS
A Case Study in Anti-Semitism
and Community Relations

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PREFACE

The August 1991 anti-Semitic riot in Crown Heights has sparked intense reactions in the Jewish community, and with good reason. The open and fatal expression of hatred of Jews needs to be known -- and combated -- by everyone interested in a fair and just American society.

In responding to these intense emotions, it is critical to understand exactly what happened, the facts about what key actors said and did. In this sense, Kenneth Stern's report is especially enlightening. Its authoritative statement of the events should provide an excellent basis for understanding what occurred and constructing a meaningful response. Three points stand out in this analysis.

First, anti-Semitism was at the center of the riot. Youth from surrounding neighborhoods were called onto the streets to attack, and in one case to kill, Jews for no other reason than because they are Jews.

Second, a seriously distorted picture of the events was reported in the media. Blacks and Jews were portrayed as antagonists throughout the affair, though several black leaders denounced the violence and constructive efforts by blacks and Jews together in the neighborhood kept tensions from building even further.

Third, there are important lessons in Crown Heights for both the immediate and long-term future. We must learn how to repudiate hatred and build positive ties between members of our diverse society, and to examine what roles our community and governmental institutions should play. Both the origins and handling of the riot hold important lessons for this task.

It is the virtue of Kenneth Stern's report that he speaks to all three levels. He is unstinting -- as he should be -- in his description and denunciation of hate. He also enhances our understanding of the words, actions, and motives of all parties, from neighborhood residents to city and law enforcement officials to concerned citizens. And he addresses what we are to do if we are to realize the promise rather than the danger of pluralism in our nation's largest cities.

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CROWN HEIGHTS

A Case Study in Anti-Semitism and Community Relations

In the 1930s the Lubavitch Hasidim fled anti-Semitism in Europe, and landed in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

Half a century later, anti-Semitism caught up with them. On August 19, 1991, a 29-year-old Jewish student was murdered because he was a Jew. Jewish businesses and properties were trashed because they were owned by Jews. Crowds roamed the streets yelling "Kill the Jews!" Bottles were thrown. Jews were chased. Assaulted. The images were terrifying, and the close calls many. A police car rescued a Hasidic man, pulling him into an unmarked car seconds before a gang could catch him. "As the car jerks forward," the *Village Voice* reported, "some men yell, 'Bring the Jew back. We'll let him have it.' Others pound on the hood, chanting, 'Jew! Jew! Jew!'"

These Hasidic Jews, many of whom had fled the Holocaust and lost relatives to the Nazis, had to run into their houses fearing their neighbors who shouted "Get the Jews out!" and "Heil Hitler!"

Anti-Semitism is alive and well in Crown Heights. But it is not new there. In the summer of 1978 a group of blacks were yelling "Heil Hitler!" at Jews in Crown Heights. In 1978 Reverend Herbert Daughtry stood before a screaming crowd and said, "We'll get the Jews and the people in the long black coats."

That same summer a sixteen-year-old black named Victor Rhodes either harassed an older Hasidic man, or said "Heil Hitler" to a passing group of Hasidim, depending on whose recollection you believe. A pack of 30 Hasidic Jews beat Rhodes into a two-month coma, calling him a "dirty nigger."

Among the tragedies of Crown Heights is one of omission. When the headlines of anti-Semitism and conflict ended in the summer of 1978, no systemic, sustained attempt was made to counter hatred. It is a tragedy about to repeat itself if our approach to anti-Semitism and bigotry has not changed since 1978 -- and all indications are that it has not.

THE EVENTS

On the evening of August 19, 1991, seven-year-old Gavin Cato was riding his bicycle. He and his cousin Angela were playing on the sidewalk in front of their home, at the corner of Utica Avenue and President Street. At precisely 8:20 p.m., Gavin was fixing his bicycle chain.

At 8:20 p.m. on August 19, 1991, Grand Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson was coming home from his weekly visit to Old Montefiore Cemetery in Queens, where his wife is buried. He was riding in a three-car motorcade, escorted by police. Twenty-two-year-old Yosef Lifsh was also part of the motorcade. He drove a dark blue Mercury station wagon. Yakov and Levi Spielman, twin brothers who were training Lifsh for escort duty, were also in the station wagon. Lifsh reportedly ran a red light. He collided with another car and veered onto the sidewalk. According to Lifsh's grand jury testimony, he did everything he could to avoid hitting the children. He failed. Gavin was dragged underneath, and his cousin, Angela, was pinned against the yellow brick wall of their apartment house. Twelve of Gavin's neighbors had to lift the station wagon off his body. Some said he was near death, blood oozing from his head, mixing with the acid leaking from the smashed car battery. Some said he was already dead.

A private Hasidic ambulance, Hatzolah, came on the scene at 8:22 p.m., almost simultaneously with a city ambulance and a Hatzolah volunteer who drove his car to the scene. (One of the Spielman twins had called 911 from his cellular phone at 8:21 p.m.) The Hatzolah volunteer helped the EMS workers with the two black children. A crowd of 100 to 150 was gathering. The two Hatzolah attendants were pushing through the crowd asking "Where's the patient? Where's the patient?"

As one of the Hatzolah attendants told the *New York Jewish Week*, "A policewoman and a black man came over and said . . . [that the child was] 'being taken care of' [and that they should] 'Go over there and get that man [driver Yosef Lifsh] out of here. They're going to kill him'."

The attendants found Lifsh behind the wheel. "Three or four black people were trying to get him out and were beating him," the attendant recalled. "He was in the station wagon -- halfway in -- and he was bleeding from the face and head. The policewoman said, 'Please get this man out of here and get yourself out of here.'"

"As we took him out of the station wagon, a real big black man banged him on the head with full force." Lifsh was also robbed "of his wallet and all his money and of a cellular phone." The Hatzolah ambulance took the beaten man to the hospital.

The story spread like wildfire that night. But it was not the true story. People believed that the Hatzolah ambulance had ignored the more severely injured black children because they were black, and had treated the Hasidim because they were Jews. The presence of the EMS vehicle that attended to the children, and the growing hostile crowd were left out of the story. Even Mayor Dinkins's statement the next day reiterating what happened didn't stop the rumors. "And did the cops arrest the Jew?" asked a black man interviewed in the *Village Voice*. "No. They escorted them straight to synagogue."

A police car was trashed. "Get the Jews!" people screamed. "Jews! Jews! Jews!" was the chant. "Some youths threw bottles and set a Yeshiva van on fire," reported the *New York Times*. "A 17-year-old fired a gun at a police officer . . . another drove his car at a group of officers."

Three hours after the accident, and three blocks from the accident scene, Yankel Rosenbaum was driving by. Rosenbaum, an Australian Hasidic scholar visiting Brooklyn to study European anti-Semitism, was stopped in his car by a gang of 20 youngsters. He was assaulted, held down, stabbed on his left side, stabbed on his right side, and left on the hood of his car, blood dripping from his wounds.

Enter the professional haters. Reverend Al Sharpton. Attorneys Alton Maddox, C. Vernon Mason, and Colin Moore. Sonny Carson.¹ Rage is their medium, the facts be damned.

Senator Alfonse D'Amato said Sharpton, Maddox et al. "allegedly incit[ed] three nights of conflict in the Brooklyn community." U. S. Attorney Andrew Maloney said that some of the "self-appointed leaders" were "fanning the flames of racism and anti-Semitism."

Sixteen year old Limerick Nelson and a fifteen-year-old juvenile, whose name was not released, were arrested on August 20 for Rosenbaum's murder.²

"Four o'clock!" Sonny Carson yelled on August 20th, the day after the accident and the murder. Reverend Al Sharpton added "Four o'clock! . . . We demand the arrest and charge with murder of everyone that was in that van. . . . Four o'clock! . . . Four o'clock!"

"And we gon' defend the two brothers that have been falsely charged with the, uh murder of whoever was murdered," Sharpton said, according to the *Village Voice*.

Meanwhile Mordechai Levy, head of the violent Jewish Defense Organization, was sending young Jews into Crown Heights to protect the Hasidim. The escort service he established was one thing, the rumors he spread were another. He called the American Jewish Committee and reported that "black leaders are saying that if the driver is not arrested by 4:00 p.m., they are going to start shooting Jews on the streets." He couldn't or wouldn't give details of who said what to whom and where. The information was passed along to the authorities. If true -- and it had a ring of truth after the murder of Rosenbaum and the burning and looting of the Utica Gold Exchange and other Jewish businesses -- other tragedies were bound to happen. If untrue, but believed, tragedies were possible as well. What if the JDO folk thought every young black man in Crown Heights was ready to shoot Jews at 4:00 p.m.?

The violence continued for three days, and was primarily directed at Jews. Rocks were thrown at Jewish homes. "All you hear is shouting and screaming, thudding and glass breaking," a man told the *New York Times*. "They broke my windows and they are yelling," said a woman. "The Jewish people are afraid to walk on the streets."

Although Jews were the primary target, they were not the only victims of violence. Police and white journalists were singled out as well. Two WABC-TV journalists were cornered in a store. A *New York Times* photographer was beaten. Jimmy Breslin was attacked in a cab by a crowd screaming "white man!" They shattered the cab's windshield with a baseball bat. According to the *New York Times*, Breslin was "pummelled and kicked and then stripped of his clothing save for his underpants and his green press card." Local television news reports were broadcast from outside the local police precinct, the only safe location in the neighborhood.

¹ Carson was best known recently for organizing the black boycott of a Korean grocery store on Church Avenue in Brooklyn. His speeches and actions, going back 30 years, have been virulently anti-white and anti-Semitic.

² Rosenbaum died at Kings County Hospital. There are allegations that the care he received in the emergency room was grossly inadequate, and that he might have survived his stab wounds if he had received better care.

Sixty-five civilians and 158 police officers were injured over those three days. Twenty-seven police cars were damaged. Everyone was waiting for more. By the third night, young black males "roughly between the ages of 12 and 20 had taken to ambushing squad cars and hurling rocks from the rooftops at both police and Hasidim. There were even a few snipers," reported the *New York Times*.

Phil Caruso, the head of the police union, feared his men and women were being endangered by the lawlessness. The Jewish Community Relations Council, the American Jewish Committee and the other Jewish organizations also called for more police presence. The point was not lost on the mayor or the police commissioner. When Mayor Dinkins had called on the Cato family, he had to retreat into the house. Bottles and rocks and curses and screams of "traitor!" were hurled at him. "This is not Palestine!" the crowd shouted, "We want justice!" They pounded on his car. "Arrest the Jews!" they shouted. Not far away, an Israeli flag was burned.

That same night 100 Hasidic men rushed into a building, and were forced back by police. A Hasidic man had been hit by a rock thrown from the building's rooftop.

The police presence was increased, and the anti-Semitic violence decreased, although two shooting incidents were reported the next night, and a group of 50 to 100 young black men congregated in front of the Lubavitch headquarters and chanted "Heil Hitler."

Meanwhile, Reverend Al Sharpton, along with attorneys Maddox, Moore and Mason, vowed a citizen's arrest of the Hasidic driver, if the authorities did not arrest him. Mason, who months before had chastised Mayor Dinkins for wearing "too many yamulkas," called the mayor "racially and politically castrated." The group also announced a march for that Saturday -- one that would go past the Lubavitch headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway. The mayor and the police commissioner met with Sharpton and the other organizers and tried to have them call off the march. They would not, but agreed to change the route. On Saturday two hundred bused-in Sharpton groupies, along with 200 others who had gathered in the neighborhood, marched down Eastern Parkway. Surrounded on all sides by police, they shouted "Whose streets? Our streets!" and "No justice, no peace," along with what the *New York Times* termed "scattered obscenities."

"Several of the protestors were heard grumbling 'Sharpton sold us out,'" the *New York Times* reported. "We were supposed to be marching up Kingston so we could confront the Jews."

Neither Sharpton, Maddox, C. Vernon Mason, Colin Moore, nor Herb Daughtry had any sympathetic words to say about the murder of Rosenbaum -- it was at best an irrelevancy, and at most a symbol of the justice to which they aspire. They recast the tragic accident of Gavin Cato's death into a murder -- rather, *the* murder -- and used his funeral as an occasion for anti-Semitism and calls to violence. In other forums, they tried to make disingenuous distinctions -- between Hasidic and other Jews. But at the Cato funeral, before an overwhelmingly black audience, no such distinctions were made.

In a speech that roared, Reverend Al Sharpton said:

1988: Jesse Jackson came in here with Michigan's victory. And Ed Koch said any Jew would be crazy to vote for Jackson. I didn't hear no voice in Crown Heights condemn Ed Koch. You don't want peace! You don't want peace! You want quiet! . . . Ronald Reagan went to Bitburg and raised flags on Nazi graves. And you give him awards. But you condemn my brother Jitu Weusi for reading a student's poem 30 year ago. You don't want peace! You want quiet! . . . You want to talk?!? Don't just talk about the jewelry store in Utica. Talk about how Oppenheimer, in South Africa, sends diamonds straight to Tel Aviv and deals with the diamond merchants right here in Crown Heights. . . . The issue is not

anti-Semitism. The issue is *apartheid*.

We've shown where we can burn. . . . We must not reprimand our children for outrage when it is the outrage that was put in them by an oppressive system. The bible says that a man sows that shall he also reap. Well, Reverend, who sowed violence? You sowed the violence. You took my brothers to the Persian Gulf and trained them how to kill. You went to the precinct and whipped cops on the 6-o'clock news, and not one Hasidim went to jail. Don't tell us about violence!

Reverend Daughtry compared the Hasidim to the Ku Klux Klan. Sonny Carson drew applause when he said, "We ain't going out on the streets and say nothing to these young people, because you may not like it, but I'm very proud of them." Carson complained that the Hasidic driver had not been arrested. He said that Yosef Lifsh "should have been arrested because he was an unlicensed driver. Put it in print, media! He didn't, none of 'em have licenses!"

Facts didn't matter. Carson made up the charge about the license. The next day, not to be outdone, Sharpton and Colin Moore claimed that the driver was "drunk."

Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes (who had been special prosecutor for the pack of white youths responsible for killing a black youth at Howard Beach) took the unusual step of appearing on New York's black-oriented station, WLIB-AM, to discuss the case while it was before the grand jury. Hynes explained that the driver had been tested for alcohol, and had a reading of .000 -- no alcohol. Hynes explained that an accident which resulted in death was not necessarily a crime -- that gross negligence had to be involved, and that the running of a red light in a motorcade might not have been gross negligence. Hynes cited 22 similar cases -- most involving drivers from minority communities -- in which there had been no indictment.

The Sharptons were not satisfied. They wanted Hynes removed from the case because he was biased. What was his bias? He had visited Israel on a trip sponsored by a Jewish group. Hynes ridiculed the charge, noting that he had also been the guest of black groups on trips.

The black community of Crown Heights is largely made up of Caribbean immigrants. Every Labor Day, Eastern Parkway turns into the West Indian American Carnival and Parade. The mayor, who by now had had regular meetings with both black and Hasidic leaders, refused a Hasidic request that the parade be canceled, but secured an invitation for representatives of the Lubavitch community to march. It was a celebration. The mayor marched at the head of the parade with Lubavitch and blacks. Monday, September 2, 1991, was a day of peace in Crown Heights. While the sun was shining, the only contentious gathering was a group of 25 young black men who congregated in front of the Lubavitch headquarters with signs that said such things as "If it's kosher, don't buy it." At night, however, as had happened sporadically throughout, there were incidents of violence, as there would be the following Thursday, when the grand jury announced that it would not indict Lifsh in the accidental death of Gavin Cato.³

Other nights saw violence too, and although the Hasidic community was safer from anti-Semitic violence than it was the first few nights in August, it was not safe. Berel Actipis, a Lubavitch student, needed stitches "to hold his nose on his face," Rabbi Shmuel Butman said. A half dozen black teenagers had attacked him. One of the assailants had wielded a broken bottle.

³ The press reported that Lifsh went to Israel after the grand jury did not indict him. Al Sharpton and Alton Maddox flew to Israel on September 17, 1991 in an attempt to serve Lifsh with papers in a 100 million dollar civil suit. As Sharpton was disembarking from an El Al plane in Israel, another passenger recognized him and yelled, "Go back to where you came from," and "Go to hell." Sharpton replied "I am in hell already, I am in Israel."

Despite the relative calm, the fear and hatred and the agenda of the hatemongers still continues in Crown Heights. Crowds organized by the Sharptons and Carsons can be expected for as long as they can milk the rage. Rallies in defense of the murderers of Yankel Rosenbaum can be expected. The riot may be over in Crown Heights, but the conditions that produced the riot are not. Anti-Semitism exists. Racism exists. Inequities and perceived inequities exist. Other eruptions are possible -- perhaps, as Reverend Herbert Daughtry either threatened or predicted during the Cato funeral, not only in Crown Heights, but in nearby Williamsburg, another community where Hasidim live.

SIDETRACKS AND SETBACKS: THE MEDIA

"Many Blacks, no Jews arrested in Crown Heights," read the incendiary caption of the August 24, 1991, edition of the *Amsterdam News*, New York's leading black-oriented newspaper. "If we don't get justice," read the emboldened quote on the front page from a Crown Heights resident, "we will call for Black power, then revolution."

Inside was a cartoon about the other explosive black-Jewish issue of the summer, the anti-Semitic speech of City University professor Leonard Jeffries. The graphic depicted an ugly caricature of a Jew, holding up a petition, saying he wanted to fight the racism of Professor Jeffries and support equality, but what he really meant was to fight this "nigger" and work for racial superiority.

The *Amsterdam News* wrote about the "carful of Jews" that killed Gavin Cato. A poem referred to the death as a "murder." The Hasidim were described as a hateful cult.

While the anti-Semitic riots continued, the *City Sun*, the other major black-oriented newspaper, ran a two part series on how the Jews were responsible for the slave trade.

Hate was also heard on WLIB-AM. Not only was the blatant anti-Semitism and justification of anti-Semitic violence of the Cato funeral aired, but call-in shows and commentaries added to the incitement.

Perhaps the most *chutzpahdik* of all was a front page article in the September 7, 1991, edition of the *Amsterdam News*, reporting on a "Crown Heights community forum" that heard from black and Jewish "scholars and activists." The forum, which heard from Colin Moore and Sonny Carson, was held on a Saturday -- Shabbos for the Jews. Obviously, none of the Hasidim were expected to attend. One of the leading black speakers was Professor Henrik Clarke, known for his view that Jews such as Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Albert Einstein represented an "evil" genius that had colonized the minds of the world.

The Jews were "represented" by Mimi Rosenberg,⁴ who said that Jews were racist and "profited from the Triangular slave trade," and Lenni Brenner,⁵ who recently said, "Just as there were no good Nazis, there are no good Zionists." Al Kutzik, a member of New Jewish Agenda, was also there. He called for "an end to violence, insult and stereotyping," and talked about anti-Semitism. According to the *Amsterdam News*, Kutzik's "emphasis on the presence of anti-Semitism in Crown Heights brought occasional jeers from the audience. . . . [Mimi] Rosenberg insisted that there was no significant anti-Semitism in the country today."

Newspapers print what they think will sell papers. The *Amsterdam News* and the *City Sun* apparently thought that promoting the Sharptons and Carsons as leaders would sell their papers. Unfortunately, so did

⁴ Mimi Rosenberg, an attorney and "community organizer," regularly speaks in Brooklyn. She castigates Jews and the Jewish community for various evils.

⁵ Lenni Brenner, who writes for the *Amsterdam News*, regularly criticizes Israel and other things Jewish.

some of the "mainstream" papers. But whereas the black newspapers can be faulted for fanning the flames of hatred by what they wrote, the mainstream papers can be faulted for fanning the flames of hatred by what they did not write.

First, and most serious, they either did not report, or did not report well on, strong statements from leading blacks and others condemning violence, anti-Semitism and racism.

Few New Yorkers knew that on August 22, 1991, some black and Jewish clergy, both well known and lesser known, came together and issued a "statement on racial tensions in New York." The statement certainly could have been stronger, and more clergy could have joined it. But it was an important start with an essential message, one that should have been more widely reported.

Few New Yorkers knew that the mayor, the Brooklyn borough president, and 40 elected and community leaders came together on August 22, 1991 and issued a statement calling for peace and justice, and an end to the "blind hatred and violence" that caused Yankel Rosenbaum's death. Among the signers were Albert Vann, a New York assemblyman; Major Owens, a congressman; Dr. Edison O. Jackson, president of Medgar Evers College; Roy A. Hastick of the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce, and many other leaders of the black community.

Few New Yorkers knew that on August 23, 1991, Hazel Dukes, the president of the NAACP; Dennis Wolcott, executive director of the New York Urban League; and Dr. Roscoe Brown, president of 100 Black Men, spoke out against the anti-Semitic violence in Crown Heights.

"Where are the responsible black leaders?" many New Yorkers wanted to know. Certainly, more voices against bigotry could have been added to the chorus. But it was important to know that the Hazel Dukes and the Roscoe Browns and the Al Vanns and the Major Owens spoke out against violence and anti-Semitism. There *were* press conferences and statements and faxes. But this story went unreported, despite the best efforts of many.

Michael Meyers, a former NAACP official, is the new executive director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition. "To be silent," he wrote to the *New York Times*, "is to condone anti-Semitism." He wrote an op-ed piece for the *Times* urging other blacks to speak out. It was not printed.

Two days after Gavin Cato was run over, Michael Meyers, along with Margaret Fung (the executive director of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund) and Norman Siegel (executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union) issued a strongly worded statement about the violence in Crown Heights, and the hatred that led to the attack on Yankel Rosenbaum. No paper picked up the statement.

On September 3, Meyers issued another statement decrying "dangerous racial rhetoric" and anti-Semitism. The *Times* did not mention it. On September 4, Meyers called for an end to the anti-Semitism evidenced in the speeches at the Cato funeral. It was not printed. Meyers held a press conference outlining the New York Civil Rights Coalition's plans to counteract "the rising tide of racism and anti-Semitism in Crown Heights." The *Times* did not cover it.

Michael Meyers is a long-time, active, credible member of the civil rights community, and he heads a respected organization that has organized rallies and programs for racial justice and understanding in many communities of New York. He was not silent. He spoke against racism and anti-Semitism articulately and with passion. But the public thinks he was silent, because the mainstream media did not report what he said.

Another misperception created by the mainstream press was the role of the Jewish establishment.

Some who chastized the Jewish organized community for perceived inaction may not have known fully what the organizations were doing, or misunderstood motivations for statements issued during the midst of a riot.

On August 21, 1991, the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) met with the leadership of the Crown Heights Jewish community, along with the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, AMIT, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, Hillel/JACY, Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, National Council of Young Israel, and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Speaking on behalf of all these organization, Kenneth Bialkin, president of the JCRC, denounced the anti-Semitic violence in Crown Heights and called on Mayor Dinkins to restore order.

An emergency committee was set up. A JCRC staff person was in Crown Heights on an average of 20 hours a day. Members of the various agencies were frequently in the community.

The agency faxes in the first few days of the riot were framed in diplomatic tones. The word choices were not for lack of concern for Crown Heights, but rather a manifestation of that concern. A Jew had been killed simply because he was a Jew. People were on the streets yelling "Heil Hitler!" Jews were being targeted. At the time, it seemed the best strategy for public statements in such a combustible situations were ones that would help, as David Pollock, the associate director of the JCRC described them, "return quiet to the streets . . . [and to avoid] further bloodshed."

In the days that followed Jewish spokespeople from the various agencies were ubiquitous on the airwaves. ADL national director Abe Foxman called a press conference and blasted the naked anti-Semitism in Crown Heights. AJC staff members were frequently on television and radio decrying the anti-Semitic violence and discussing long-term solutions to the problems in Crown Heights. AJC was represented on a roundtable radio discussion with Dennis DeLeon, New York's commissioner of human rights. An on-air suggestion for a rumor control center was accepted. An off-the-air suggestion that the radio station copy a model from AJC's Houston chapter that uses talk radio for a dialogue between black and Jewish groups was embraced enthusiastically by the radio host and supported by the commissioner.

Certainly, additional faxes in stronger language could and should have been issued. There is no doubt that such faxes would have made Jews who live far away from Crown Heights feel better. But what the newspapers overlooked was the feverish work of all the Jewish agencies on the ground in Crown Heights and over the broadcast media, trying to bring peace to a simmering volcano of hate.

Also not mentioned in the mainstream media, of course, was the behind-the-scenes work of the agencies. Jewish agencies met with the mayor and other city officials to insure proper police protection. They also provided information and advice to other Jewish groups closer to the communities that are more likely to listen to the Al Sharptons.

CROWN HEIGHTS, THE OUTSIDE JEWISH COMMUNITY, AND BLACK ANTI-SEMITISM

Most Jews around the country have no connection with the Lubavitch community. Yet when they heard screams of "Heil Hitler" and "Get the Jews," all Jews felt attacked.

In the aftermath of Crown Heights, some Jewish leaders have questioned the continuing wisdom of working for black-Jewish cooperation. Dialogue and intergroup work seems much easier with other groups these days -- Hispanics and Asians, for example. There is a palpable feeling that after all the flash

points of tension between the two communities in recent years -- Farrakhan, Jesse Jackson, quotas, Dr. Jeffries, to name just a few -- the historic links between the two communities have been broken, and that there is no good reason to repair them. Some point to the fact that Jews and blacks, as groups, are on different socioeconomic levels, and that therefore their interests diverge.

Black anti-Semitism is a fact. But those who argue that it is rampant do so without benefit of data. There has been no comprehensive study of black attitudes toward Jews for ten years. Blacks and Jews, both victims of discrimination, have worked together on a common agenda for decades. The security of both groups is increased in a society which promotes pluralism, combats discrimination, and strives for social and economic justice. If that agenda is to be abandoned because of the belief that, for the most part, blacks hate Jews, such an important decision must be made on the basis of fact, not incidents. It is the Sharptons and the Carsons who argue that blacks and whites in general -- and blacks and Jews in particular -- have nothing in common. They win if their hate can manipulate others' fears. Just as it takes only one adolescent with a spray can to terrorize a community by painting a swastika on a synagogue, it takes only a few hundred kids -- some even bused in -- to make an anti-Semitic riot. Their hate should not define a community's agenda. Nor should perceived difficulties between groups result in less contact. What kind of society are we if we run away from difficult problems, rather than see them as a danger sign, crying for our increased attention?

Because the relations between the two communities are so important, the American Jewish Committee and the Joint Center on Political and Economic Studies (the most respected black think tank) are working together to commission a study of black attitudes toward Jews and Jewish attitudes toward blacks. But even before that study occurs, there are objective indications that the hatemongers might not reflect the attitudes of the community they allege they speak for.

On September 12, 1991, New Yorkers went to the polls to select candidates for the newly expanded City Council. C. Vernon Mason, one of the Sharpton gang, came in third in a four-way race in Manhattan. The winner was Stanley Michels, a Jew. In an overwhelmingly black Brooklyn district, Colin Moore, another of the Sharpton gang, came in second in an eight-way race. Despite the tremendous amount of free media coverage he received during the Crown Heights riots, he received only 1,625 votes out of 7,316 cast. The winner was Susan Alter. Susan Alter is also a Jew.

DO WE REALLY KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT ANTI-SEMITISM?

The reactions of many to the vile anti-Semitism in the streets of Crown Heights was a replay of the Farrakhan episode in 1984. The instincts were good -- demanding broad repudiation of bigotry -- but the analysis could have been sharper.

The first reaction of many was to demand prompt denunciation of anti-Semitism from black leaders. Certainly, it is important that bigotry be condemned by as many people as possible. And certainly many more black officials could have condemned the Sharptons and Carsons. The reluctance of some black politicians to speak out likely reflected their calculation that they would gain few votes, and risk more, in their communities by doing so. There were, of course, notable exceptions -- starting with the mayor and key members of his administration. Many other prominent blacks spoke out as well -- and were ignored by the mainstream media, leaving the impression that all black leaders were silent.

The media coverage aside, is it wise for people to focus so much on the accounting of which leaders-from-the-community-that-is-spewing-the-hate-are-speaking-out?

First, why were condemnations expected only from the black community? Of course, it was important that black leaders speak out, especially since those expressing anti-Semitism in Crown Heights

were black. But if the theory is that speaking out against bigotry will make expressions of hatred less acceptable, why not expect denunciations from all leaders?

Second, even though the speaking out against bigotry is imperative, is this really the only gauge of how effective the combating of anti-Semitism is? Assume that every major black leader in New York condemned the anti-Semitic violence. That would have been of crucial importance, but would that have been enough? Would that really change the attitude of the Sharpton groupie who yells "Heil Hitler?" or gets pleasure from the fact that a Jew was killed? Would it address the underlying reasons that created an active, violent, anti-Semitic critical mass in Crown Heights? Even if the *New York Times* had reported the statements of Hazel Duker and Roscoe Brown and Michael Meyers, would the Jews in Crown Heights have been made safe by those words alone?

There was an anti-Semitic riot in Crown Heights! Jews were attacked. Their windows broken. Their businesses burned. They were knifed. Chased. Slashed with jagged edges of broken bottles. Left to die on car hoods. There is something terribly wrong and dangerous and continuing here. Is the quality and quantity of black officials' words all that people of goodwill want as a cure for this situation? Will that really change the dynamic of the hate and anti-Semitism?

When all that people of goodwill focus on are words, all that they will get will be words. Words are important -- in fact, essential. There surely should have been more words. But words alone are not enough. The problems in Crown Heights are more deeply rooted, and cannot be cured with a good quote.

Likewise, all that was demanded from the Jewish defense organizations -- in fact, all that was critiqued -- was their public statements. They should have been more frequent. They should have used the "a/s word" sooner, and with greater emphasis. Perhaps so. But is all we demand of the Jewish agencies correctly worded and appropriately timed press releases and heavily burdened faxes?

Yes, words are important. But anti-Semitism is more than words. It is deadly. It can grow quickly. When we only demand a good public relations campaign in response to the anti-Semitic ramblings of the Sharpton crowd, we demand too little.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE ANTI-SEMITISM IN CROWN HEIGHTS

Once the violence in Crown Heights is dormant, attention will be focused elsewhere. If violence or some other event draws attention, Crown Heights will be in the newspapers again. And then the attention will fade. No press releases or condemnatory statements will be expected then. None will be issued. And the hatred and anti-Semitism that is clearly brewing in Crown Heights will be left, unaddressed.

One answer is relatively simple. Since so much concern is always given to the question "who said what with what words when?" the mechanics to answer that question quickly, and get beyond it, need to be set up now, before another crisis.

Bigotry and anti-Semitism should always be deplored by the entire community. The mayor, with the help of New York's ethnic, civil rights, and religious organizations, should convene a group that pledges itself to speak up, in unison, against hatred and those who preach and practice it. These combined voices will speak with a volume that will be hard to ignore, and with a broad-based moral force that will encourage others to speak out as well. The more people who speak out against bigotry, the easier it will be to move on to more difficult concerns.

An anti-Semitic tragedy like Crown Heights should not just be reacted to. When a riot of hate occurs, the media will write and broadcast stories. Community leaders will be asked for quotes. With public

attention focused on the existence of bigotry, leaders must exploit the opportunity to articulate concrete solutions.

The riot in Crown Heights was not simply a collection of anti-Semitic expressions and actions; Crown Heights was a culture in which anti-Semitism was allowed to grow. It was also a special case -- one that involved a unique Jewish community and a unique black community. But the problems in Crown Heights are not that unusual. It is not as if one day the black community in Crown Heights woke up and decided anti-Semitism was a fine philosophy to adopt.

The roots of the crisis in Crown Heights are deep, and go back many years. They involve economics, relations with government, distribution of goods and services, class differences, political power, and changing demographics. For both blacks and Jews there are gut issues of abstract justice and social policy. Growing from these roots are countless ugly incidents that have been grafted onto the memory of the community. The contentions between the communities were inevitable. The ugliness was not. Each side saw the other as unconcerned with the social injustices that each perceived as victimizing them. There were few, if any, institutional bridges set up to find what would not have been too hard to discover -- common areas of concern. There were few mechanisms set up to dispel the prejudice and stereotypes that can run rampant between two vying communities that live in the same space, but in worlds apart.

The anti-Semitism in Crown Height 1991 is a direct result of a societal void filled with hate. The roadmarks to the riots of 1991 were clear, and many.

Until the late 1950s and early 1960s Crown Heights was predominately a middle class Jewish neighborhood. As blacks from Haiti, Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados and Grenada moved in thirty years ago, many Jews started moving out -- helped with pressure from real estate agents who used scare tactics.

One Jewish community -- the Lubavitchers -- chose to remain.

Enter Sonny Carson in 1970. He organized a group that demanded a reshuffling of antipoverty funds between the black and Jewish communities. His argument was that the population had shifted between 1960 and 1970, and that the funds were being allocated according to the old census in which 52 percent of the population was black and 48 percent white, and not the new estimates that had blacks as 65 percent of the population. Highlighted was the fact that two black poverty agencies received \$145,000 while a Jewish poverty agency received \$180,000. Less attention was apparently paid to the fact that overall funds were distributed on a 70-30 basis to blacks and Jews.

In the middle of July 1970, dissension in Crown Heights over the poverty funds was running high. Carson's rhetoric was hot. A series of fires were started by black youngsters. Twenty-five fires were set in ten days, all on Jewish-owned property, all within three blocks of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council.

At 5:45 a.m. on July 20, 1970, a firebomb was tossed at the Council building, a five-room storefront office. It was gutted.

Some more Jews moved away. The Lubavitchers stayed.

In 1972, a group called the "Concerned Citizens of Crown Heights" distributed a leaflet at election time that read: "\$525,000 -- THAT'S HOW MUCH OF YOUR MONEY YOU ARE PUTTING IN THE HANDS OF THE JEW." (The "j" was in lower case.) Blockbusting real estate agents were active all over Crown Heights and neighboring East Flatbush. In 1972 seventy-five of them were investigated by New York State. More Jews moved. The Lubavitch stayed.

One of the complaints of the rioters in 1991 was preferential treatment for Hasidim by the police, especially when it came to parking.⁶ That complaint was also front-page news in 1973.

In 1966, the police established a partial barricade on the service road in front of Lubavitch headquarters. It was erected during Friday night and Saturday services, and during other events that drew large crowds. Despite the barricades, cars that did not belong on the block went through from time to time, and Lubavitch children were struck -- one even suffered a fractured skull.

Also living on that street was Dr. Rufus Nichols. Dr. Nichols asked that the barricades be taken down, as they were an inconvenience for him: The Lubavitch refused. On June 2, 1973, Dr. Nichols was returning home. A riot occurred.

According to the *Amsterdam News*, "Dr. Nichols was attacked as he drove his car along the street. . . . The Jews pounded on [his car] as they shouted 'you nigger, you nigger.'"

According to the Hasidim, Dr. Nichols drove down the street at a high rate of speed. He blared his horn and raced up to a group of children before slamming on his brakes. An altercation began and the police came. Two Hasidim were arrested. A rabbi asked if the arrested men could walk to the police station, as this was the Sabbath and they were prohibited from driving. The officers refused.

There were many Hasidim on the scene. A police officer swung at one, who ran into the synagogue. The police officer followed him inside, with his gun drawn, in the middle of services. According to the *Jewish Week*, one police officer shouted "I'm a Nazi and I'm going to kill all you Jews." Another said, "Hitler didn't do enough." The Hasidim accused the police of hitting them indiscriminately with clubs.⁷

The readers of the *Amsterdam News* no doubt believed that the Hasidim, who had special police protection, attacked Dr. Nichols and shouted slurs at him because he was black. These readers would know nothing about the anti-Semitic police actions.

The readers of the *Jewish Week* would know nothing about the racist statements attributed to the Hasidim. They would see the police as protecting a black doctor, not caring that he had endangered Lubavitch children.

Hostilities between the groups grew. On July 7, 1973, Bruce Battle, a 15-year-old black youth, was beaten by a group of six Hasidim. They hit him in the mouth, nose, and head, and kicked him in the stomach. As they pummeled Battle, the Hasidim said, "You black-ass nigger, we will kill you." The Hasidim had mistaken Battle for a member of a gang that had assaulted one of the Hasidim earlier.

In September 1975, a Jew was murdered during a Sabbath robbery. His funeral was disrupted by schoolchildren and others who shouted "Heil Hitler! Hitler was right!"

⁶ One black resident of Crown Heights alleged that the Lubavitch had "invented" a holiday that didn't exist -- Lag B'Omer -- just so they could create parking problems that would make it impossible for blacks to visit their mothers on Mother's Day.

⁷ In 1983, a Hasid was arrested and other Hasidim interfered with the police. A melee broke out. Between 150 and 200 Hasidim marched on the police station. They applauded when injured police officers were removed, some on stretchers. They applauded loudest when a black police officer was removed on a stretcher. The police reduced charges on those arrested from felonies to misdemeanors so that they did not need to be jailed.

A Crown Heights rabbinical court thereafter issued an edict that Lubavitchers were prohibited from interfering with police in the performance of their duties.

In addition to the slurs and the street fighting, political battles emerged. Fights over redistricting were hard fought -- the changing of district lines would help or hurt one community at the expense of the other.

Allegations of unfair treatment were common, as were different perceptions of the same reality. A police car was stationed in front of Lubavitch headquarters because of attacks on them by the Satmar, a rival Hasidic sect. To the black community, this was a symbol of special treatment.

On June 14, 1977, the son of a rabbi was stabbed to death.

According to the *Black Panther* paper, "On June 18, 1977, a car driven by a Hasidic man struck a Black youth on a bicycle. . . . The driver jumped out of the car and started to beat the young Black man until two other Black youths arrived on the scene. This caused a crowd of Hasidim to gather. . . . [In reaction], over 500 Black people demonstrated."

On June 14, 1978, Arthur Miller, a black businessman, was killed by the police when he protested the arrest of his brother. Days later Victor Rhodes, a 16-year old black youth, was beaten into a coma by a group of Hasidim. Some Hasidic leaders alleged that Rhodes had knocked off the hat of an elder Hasid.

The Hasidic community's response to the increased violence was to organize a civilian patrol group. In the black press, they were called "vigilantes," and were held responsible for attacks on blacks.

After Rhodes was beaten, Rev. Herbert Daughtry announced a black civilian patrol, which the black press also called "vigilantes." The announced need was not only protection, but political -- to counter what was seen as the extensive influence of the Hasidim. Sixty men took an oath: "We're fired up. We won't take any more," they chanted. The induction ceremony included mingling blood from their fingers and extinguishing a candle with a bare hand.

With the unit in place, more than 2,000 blacks demonstrated in front of the Lubavitch headquarters on July 16, 1978. According to the *Amsterdam News*, they "vowed to apply Moses law in the Old Testament (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) 'the next time any Hasidic Jew kills or assaults any of our people.'" According to the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Reverend Daughtry said, "We want them to know the next time a Hasidic terrorist touches one of our kids, we are going to tear this community apart." The *Village Voice* wrote of a van outfitted with a loudspeaker that rode up and down the streets during Shabbos. A voice boomed, "We're gonna burn down the Hasidic homes, we won't let the Hasidic Jews rape our women."

Tensions were so high that a local civic leader described Crown Heights as a "police state."

Commenting on the rally and its aftermath, Harold M. Jacobs said "the Jews of Crown Heights have been victimized for years by numerous acts of violence which went unreported in the media, while a single incident in which a black youth was injured attracts sensational news coverage."

On July 24, 1978, Mayor Koch removed the police car that had been stationed in front of Lubavitch headquarters. The car was reassigned as a "house of worship patrol car," covering the neighborhood churches and synagogues. The Lubavitch viewed the change as a sell-out to the black radicals. Rabbi Leib Groner decried the decision. He pointed to the heated demonstration in front of Lubavitch headquarters the week before. "They called for their people to get guns and rifles, and to use them," he said. "We need the patrol now more than ever."

Do things ever change? The anger and hurt and mistrust and distance piles on.

In 1986, a group of black youths beat a Hasidic man unconscious on a subway platform. He died.

In April, 1987, 400 blacks marched to protest the Hasidic surveillance patrol, which they said harassed blacks.

In March 1989, a black teenager was surrounded and beaten by a crowd of Hasidic Jews who claimed that he had slashed a Hasidic boy and his mother.

The anger and mistrust and stereotypes and counterclaims have become the fabric of life in Crown Heights.

A black woman told the *New York Times* this August, "It's the way black people are looked at, the assumptions about black people. That black people are no good, stupid, gross."

Another black woman told the *Times*, "My husband is afraid to go down the street at night to get baby formula." She accused the Hasidic patrols of "always questioning him about what he is doing on his own block."

Also complaining of the patrols was Kobie Foster. "We're not living in their neighborhood," he said, "they're living in our neighborhood."

The marchers shouted "Whose streets? Our streets." Crown Heights was not perceived as a community, but a war over turf and power fueled with bigotry and anti-Semitism. 300,000 people live in Crown Heights today. Eighty percent are black, 10 percent are white, 9 percent are Hispanic and 1 percent are Asian. Most of the whites are Lubavitch. Many, both Jew and black, live in beautiful old brownstones, and are proudly middle class. But Crown Heights also has rundown walk-up apartments and huge projects that reek of crime and despair. This is fertile ground for hate, especially when each group has a history of hurt, and citable proof that the authorities favor the other side on every issue -- goods, services, housing, police protection. There is poverty in Crown Heights. There is despair in Crown Heights. And even though poor Jews and middle class blacks live there as well, on balance, the black community is poorer than the white Jewish community. Scapegoating and anti-Semitism are unavoidable, especially if there are people like the Sharpton gang who make it an art form.⁸ Unfortunately, the history of the last 30 years in Crown Heights proves that people of good will do no go beyond the "correct words" of response, and try to change this reality.

There have been some minor efforts. In 1987, a home owned by blacks was firebombed. Tensions grew. Thirty Hasidim and thirty blacks formed a combined community patrol force. According to the *New York Times*, "it lasted a few days."

In the midst of the 1991 riot, the Brooklyn Children's Museum, located in Crown Heights, had computer programs that taught black children about the history and culture of the Lubavitch and Lubavitch children about the history and culture of blacks. The children learned about each other as human beings.

In the midst of the 1991 riot, the New York Human Rights Commission and the city's Commission

⁸ According to national poll data analyzed in the August 11, 1991 edition of the *New York Times*, "though still a clear minority, some blacks have . . . embraced . . . conspiracy theories [to explain] AIDS, crack, violence and poverty." For example, "25 percent of blacks agree that the Government 'deliberately makes sure that drugs are easily available in poor black neighborhoods.' Another 35 percent said that this was possibly true. Four percent of whites said true and 12 percent said possibly true."

Classical anti-Semitism sees Jews conspiring to attack the body of non-Jewish populations. A receptiveness to conspiracy theories should make anti-Semitism easier to adopt.

of Youth Services talked with neighborhood youth. They brought blacks and Hasidim together, so that they became real to each other as people. Stereotypes were challenged.

"We just got a chance to talk about the cultural life -- why they don't eat a lot of stuff we eat," Sheirell Leroy told the *New York Times*, "Then, it was, do they fear us? They said it wasn't fear of black people, but fear of something happening. I understand that."

Rafael Rosenberg said, "Some of my friends felt that blacks had no fear of walking through a Hasidic neighborhood, but just the opposite is true."

These programs are invaluable, and the proof is that they work. While groups of blacks and Jews met in Crown Heights, across the Hudson river in Teaneck, New Jersey, a crisis was avoided because of such a dialogue.⁹

These programs, and gestures like the combined gift of an ambulance to the Crown Heights black community from Hatzolah and another Brooklyn black private ambulance service, are needed. But they are not sufficient. They have been tried in the past. Eventually, the momentum caused by the crisis slows. The programs die. The tensions, stereotypes, and hatred remain, fester, and grow.

One of the most troubling aspects of the 1991 crisis in Crown Heights was the inability of blacks and Jews to recognize the important, emotional, defining issues that members of each community carry around in their gut. Few expressions of sympathy for the murder of a Jew were heard by individual members, as opposed to some leaders, of the black community. One radio talk show host kept trying to extract any such acknowledgment from a black schoolteacher who phoned his show. She was incapable of seeing beyond her own community, which she defined as black Crown Heights, and not Crown Heights.

Likewise, even though some Lubavitch rabbis made public gestures to the Cato family as emissaries of Rabbi Schneerson, the Rebbe himself did not. But no Lubavitcher who heard the Rebbe that week would say he was silent. The Rebbe speaks in "allegories" during services. The Torah portion the week of the riot dealt with Jewish-Gentile relations. Every Lubavitcher listening to the Rebbe knew he was speaking about the Cato family, even though he did not mention them by name. But the reasons why the Rebbe did not speak to the Cato family directly were not articulated in a way that the black community could understand. Without an intercommunity translation to explain that the Rebbe spoke out in the same way he always addresses important concerns, how could black residents of Crown Heights not believe the Rebbe was indifferent? Certainly, Gavin Cato was not murdered, and Yankel Rosenbaum was. Nonetheless, expressions of concern and sympathy were important to hear. This was New York. Too many poor black children die every day. It takes its toll.

There is hate in Crown Heights, and each episode of hate fuels another. Blacks and Jews have to work to reduce the stockpiles of animosity each incident adds to.

David Pollack of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council wrote that his group "will

⁹ Kahane Chai, a Brooklyn group dedicated to the philosophy of the late Meir Kahane, was planning to march in front of the Teaneck home of Dr. Leonard Jeffries, to protest his anti-Semitic teaching. A black group, the African Council, planned a counter-march on a Saturday in front of local synagogues. The situation was defused when the black group learned that the local Jewish community had nothing to do with Kahane Chai -- the African Council had presumed that the protest of Jeffries was instigated by the local Jewish groups. They also learned how offensive a counter-march on the Sabbath would be. Instead of a confrontation, the two groups issued a statement deploring "the escalation of demonstrations that disturb our tranquility at a time when we are trying to find each other again. . . ." With this sort of interaction and new trust, there is a possibility that the groups might be able to examine honestly other issues that divide them -- such as Dr. Jeffries' anti-Semitism.

work with the Board of Jewish Education to develop a prejudice reduction curriculum to be included in Jewish schools." Diane Steinman, director of the American Jewish Committee's New York Chapter, says "We will seek to work in Crown Heights with blacks and Jews, using our expertise in intergroup relations."

These are steps in the right direction. But they are not enough. Just as it is offensive and unrealistic to assume that it is the black community's job to rid America of racism, it is equally inappropriate to see the eradication of anti-Semitism as an exclusively Jewish concern.

Hatred will flourish in Crown Heights as long as government officials, clergy, and community groups see the field of intergroup relations as less important than the running of schools, the protection of police and firefighters, and the regular pickups of the Sanitation Department. People in Crown Heights, both black and Jewish, have been attacked. Both communities have been scarred by hatred. Would anyone tolerate the lack of sanitation services for 30 years, or the lack of schools, or of other essential services? Systemic, in-place, funded, designed-to-become-unremarkable services to combat communal illiteracy *are* essential services. The city has just as much responsibility to provide these services with tax dollars as it does street lights and fire hydrants.

As a society, we have never even created a field of scholarly inquiry that defines successful models to fight stereotypes and hatred, to bring people from diverse backgrounds together in a community. But some things we know already.

Children are taught to hate. It is happening in Crown Heights today. A ten-year-old black child said, "There was a riot! The cops was losing! Black people was winning. That's the part I like about it."

Children can also be taught the skills necessary to reject hate, racism and anti-Semitism. The city should insist that schools teach prejudice reduction, just as it insists schools teach math and reading and writing. Preschool children from both communities should be drawn together to play and learn about each other. Every key institution in the community should be enlisted, encouraged, or prodded to see a mission of teaching young people how to live together. The mayor should ask his commissioners for an annual accounting of what their agencies have done to promote healthy intergroup relations.¹⁰

Clergy have to become involved. Structures have to be built that pull religious leaders closer together. When the Sharptons and the Daughtrys define the problems in the community in a way that says that hate and anti-Semitism are nonexistent or irrelevant, other clergy must say -- in unison, on the streets, in the community, and through their sermons -- that even though other concerns are pressing, bigotry is never irrelevant or to be ignored. They must say that a climate that allows bigotry against one group allows bigotry to grow against all. The city should help the clergy develop such a role, one that also goes beyond the mere issuing of statements. The clergy should be a force to teach their respective communities of the perceived needs of their neighbors -- and the dynamics and human terror that is racism and anti-Semitism. These lessons must occur all the time, not only in response to riots.

The city must also have a more sophisticated plan for dealing with the hatemongers.¹¹ The Al Sharptons attach themselves like leeches to families who have suffered tragedies. They no doubt have an attractive pitch -- your loss will not be in vain or forgotten, we will get justice, we will make sure that

¹⁰ For example, if the Parks Department is going to conduct tennis clinics for youth, it should plan to bring children of different backgrounds together.

¹¹ Abe Rosenthal criticized Mayor Dinkins for meeting with the Sharpton gang, alleging that he gave the haters undeserved legitimacy. Certainly, the mayor should avoid meeting with such people unless there is a real need to. These questions are tough judgment calls, but in this case, it was important that the mayor do all he could to insure that a march did not turn into another riot.

something good for our people develops from this awful event, etc.

Sharpton is successful in his own circle because he knows how to use a tragedy to promote his brand of progress, which is to instill hate. Certainly, the mayor and all the people of goodwill in the city of New York have more moral force than the Sharptons. They can diminish his message of hate by beating him to the punch -- instead of reacting to his organizing, use the incidents before he does, and as artfully as he does, to organize and teach about the needs of community and the dangers of hate. Why can't the mayor put together a group of leaders from various communities committed to going, in unison, to the people whose tragedies Sharpton exploits, and offer help that speaks of hope and not hate? And why can't a system for rumor control be ready to go, to bring forward credible spokespeople, to print leaflets, to announce a hotline for information? Is it responsible for the city to allow the hoaxers like Sharpton to fan rage with lies, and go unanswered?

There is a way to counter anti-Semitism in Crown Heights. Mayor Dinkins, Police Commissioner Brown, Human Rights Commissioner DeLeon and countless other city officials showed great courage going to Crown Heights in the middle of a riot, dodging bottles and rocks and speaking of peace. Their moral presence and clear statements condemning anti-Semitism were a start. But that cannot be enough. The city must learn that communal literacy is an essential service that it is expected to provide. If both the black and Jewish communities do not learn what hurts each community, and what each community perceives as its needs, violence and hate and anti-Semitism are inevitable. The city has an obligation to counter hate when it can identify where it is growing. Hate grows in a community where people are willing to create a moral equivalence between the tragic death of a child who dies in an accident and a young man who is murdered by a hateful gang. When "Jew!" -- or "nigger!" or "Dago!" or "queer!" or any other expression of hate based on difference -- becomes acceptable, alarms should go off at City Hall, and in all of our living rooms. Soon words become acts. Just ask Yankel Rosenbaum.