

Faculti Summary

<https://staging.faculti.net/black-power/>

The speaker reflects on their upbringing in the 1970s during a Jewish ethnic and religious revival, which initiated a journey of self-discovery and research into Jewish identity and politics. Initially titled "Turning Inward American Jews in the 1970s," the work evolved to explore connections between Jewish identity and broader sociopolitical movements, particularly in relation to black power and civil rights.

The speaker discusses how the question "Is it good for the Jews?" was commonly contemplated among Jewish communities while exploration of Jewish identity became more public. They encountered surprising archival documents, including support from Jewish organizations for the Nation of Islam despite its anti-Semitic stance, leading them to question historical narratives and ethical implications of these findings.

They analyzed rabbinic sermons from the era, noting that many rabbis defended black power and expressed solidarity, challenging the dominant historical memory of Jews as consistent champions of civil rights. The speaker argues that the relationship between Jewish and black communities during the civil rights movement was complex, characterized by moments of unity and subsequent divergence, particularly post-1965.

Using a Y-shaped model to symbolize collaboration during the civil rights era, the speaker shifts to an X model to depict the split post-1965, eventually proposing a Z model to illustrate parallel paths influenced by black power on Jewish political activism, noting that Jewish movements like Soviet Jewry advocacy borrowed strategies from black activism.

The speaker highlights significant shifts in Jewish communal identity, linking Jewish nationalism to parallel sentiments within the African American community, while also critiquing a simplistic view of Jews as solely progressive actors. They call for an understanding of the nuanced relationship between racial privilege and the shared experiences of minority communities in striving for social justice. Ultimately, the speaker advocates for a layered comprehension of Jews' role in social justice movements, acknowledging both their progressive contributions and the complexities of their historical involvement.