



## Howard's End

by John Corry

**H**ow does the press handle Louis Farrakhan? By explaining him away for one thing; by suspending its moral sense for another. The screwball leader of the Nation of Islam has touched off a media seizure. Media seizures come and go, and as a rule have no lasting effect, although the one over Farrakhan is different. Tonya Harding, the Bobbitts, the Menendez brothers, and Michael Jackson also touched off seizures, but they represented no one except themselves, while Farrakhan commands a movement. That the movement is anti-Semitic and anti-white is apparent; that its prejudices and paranoia are shared by many black Americans is apparent, too. The press can deal with the first point, but becomes unsettled by the second. There are some things it would rather not know.

This has an established history. A few years ago, for example, the *New York Times* and CBS News found in a joint poll that 60 percent of black New Yorkers either believed, or thought it possible, that "the Government deliberately makes sure that drugs are easily available in poor black neighborhoods." More astonishing, the poll found that 29 percent of black New Yorkers either believed, or thought it possible, that AIDS had been "deliberately created in a laboratory in order to infect black people." Mandatory multi-culturalism and the drearier outpourings of black-studies departments had had their effect. It was clear that blacks and whites lived with opposing realities in America's most liberal city.

The poll made both the *Times* and CBS uneasy. The *Times* kept it off page

one, did not comment on it editorially, and ran no letters about it on the op-ed page. CBS ignored the poll's findings on the "Evening News." Black paranoia is a painful topic, and it is remarked on in the mainstream media only when it cannot be ignored. The year before the *Times*-CBS poll, the press duly, if belatedly, noted that a black aide to Mayor Harold Washington of Chicago had asserted that Jewish doctors were injecting black babies with AIDS. Virtually unnoticed, however, were similar assertions on black talk shows and in black newspapers. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* reported, for instance, that "the [AIDS] virus was made in an American military lab as a means to suppress blacks." The banner headline said: "Blacks Intentionally Infected."

(A corollary point now, harking back to the old Evil Empire, but still relevant today: Disinformation can be wonderfully effective. In 1986, two East German agents distributed a pseudo-scientific pamphlet at a conference of non-aligned nations in Zimbabwe. It said that AIDS had been created at Fort Detrick, Maryland, as an instrument of bacteriological warfare. Three months later, the accusation appeared on the front page of the *Sunday Express* in London; then it made its way around the world, eventually washing up in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and apparently on the hospitable streets of New York as well.)

**T**he recent furor over Louis Farrakhan resonates with some of the same sorry history. It began when Khalid Abdul Muhammad, one of Farrakhan's aides, spoke at predominantly black Kean College in New Jersey. The speech was standard stuff, mostly about "blood-sucking Jews," but with references to the "cracker Pope" and "faggots." Farrakhan followers often say

things like that, although usually they go unnoticed. This time, however, the Anti-Defamation League reprinted the text of the speech in an ad in the *New York Times*. This forced the press to pay attention, but often in equivocal ways.

*Time* magazine ran a story that said it was improper to ask other black leaders to condemn either Farrakhan or his aide. To do so, *Time* suggested, would be to try to enforce "racial correctness," and this, "it might be argued, is just another kind of bigotry." *Time* said that "black leaders across the country" did not want to be forced into a "ritual of condemnation." It would be better, apparently, if everyone ignored the anti-Semitic ranting.

This was too much for A.M. Rosenthal. The former executive editor of the *New York Times* knows a bad story when he sees one; he also knows about liberal-left cant. He wrote in his op-ed page column:

Professionally, the [*Time*] article is worth noting simply as a warning to other magazines, newspapers and TV news programs: This is what can come out when "news stories" are allowed to cross over into editorialization by choice of words, angling and stacking. Politicalization, distortion, ethical junk. . . . But the story also reflects something else: the sickeningly condescending attitude of so many whites, and some blacks too, toward black intelligence, independence, individualism and honor. Not a word did *Time* print to indicate that it ever crossed its collectivized-journalism mind that black leaders who denounced the speech really might despise it. . . .

Already among some Americans and in the press, there is a kind of mumble-mouthed acceptance of Mr. Farrakhan and his organization. It goes: Well, maybe he is an anti-Semite, and that's not nice, but think about his good work among drug addicts and his speeches

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about black self-responsibility. You have to admire that, don't you?

Rosenthal was prescient; the mumble-mouthed acceptance had only just begun. Lousy reporting reaffirmed the urge to excuse, patronize, and even romanticize Farrakhan and his bow-tied young soldiers. ABC's "World News Tonight" found that Nation of Islam (NOI) guards—"Their approach is to rule with respect"—had reduced serious crime in Baltimore and Chicago housing projects, and also made the projects "cleaner and quieter." This seemed to imply they should expand their activities to other cities.

The same day, however, that ABC blessed the NOI guards, the *Times* began a three-part page-one series on Farrakhan and his works. The series included some ritual mumble-mouthing—a Cambridge, Massachusetts, expert, for instance, who said the problem was white bigots, not black ones—but was distinguished more by its straight reporting, and it noted something ABC had overlooked: Housing managers in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles had hired NOI guards, and then decided not to renew their contracts. The guards did not work out. The *Times* also reported that two NOI guards at a nightclub in Inglewood, California, once murdered an unarmed customer.

Meanwhile, as the *Times* was beginning its series, *Time* magazine weighed in again, this time with massive coverage. Managing editor James R. Gaines defended the earlier *Time* piece in a full-page letter to readers; William A. Henry 3d wrote a long cover story on the Nation of Islam (he liked the idea of NOI guards, too); there were also excerpts from an interview correspondent Sylvester Monroe had with Farrakhan. ("Am I really anti-Semitic? Do I really want extermination of the Jewish people? Of course the answer is no," Farrakhan declared.)

The most provocative part of the coverage, though, was found in *Time*'s revived Forum section: three black and three Jewish thinkers commented on Farrakhan and on the relationship between blacks and Jews. This resulted in something of a crossover. In very general terms, two blacks agreed with a Jew, while two Jews agreed with a black. This, of course, was healthy, and much of the commentary was wise, but there were also exquisite samples of

mumble-mouthing. Cornel West, a professor of religion at Princeton, and also a new media favorite, offered insights such as, "We have become even more polarized, owing to our distrust of one another and our flagrant disregard for the transformative possibilities of high-quality public conversation." It was hard to know where, exactly, he stood.

On the other hand, there was no doubt about where Michael Lerner stood. The editor of *Tikkun*, the liberal Jewish bimonthly, said in *Time*'s Forum that he deplored black anti-Semitism, but that he just could not get "worked up" about it. He said this was because the white media and white establishment were hypocritical; Jews persecuted Palestinians; *Commentary* magazine opposed affirmative action; and, most of all, because getting worked up over black anti-Semitism had nothing to do with the real crisis. The real crisis, he said, is our national selfishness. Lerner sounds like a silly man.

Nonetheless, some commentators did get it right, the *Washington Post*'s Richard Cohen for one. In his column he described a rally at Howard University, "federally funded and sometimes called the Harvard of traditional black colleges." A law student named Malik Zulu Shabazz addressed an audience there of about 1,000, at least half of them other students:

"Who caught and killed Nat Turner?"

he shouted to the crowd.

"Jews," most of the audience shouted back.

"Who controls the Federal Reserve?"

"Jews."

"You're not afraid to say it, are you?"

"Jews, Jews."

"Who controls the media and Hollywood?"

"Jews."

And so on. Cohen said it was "an event chillingly evocative of the sort the Nazis used to put on," and he criticized his own paper for burying the original news story about the Howard rally at the bottom of an inside page "with not a mention of Jew-baiting in either the headline or first paragraph." Cohen said the media "apply a double standard when the bigots happen to be black." Imagine, he said, what would have happened if a white university had held a hate night.

Why, yes, just imagine. The outcry would have become part of the national agenda, dominating the evening news broadcasts while leaving prominent columnists almost too shocked for words. Imagination fails only in trying to visualize what punishment would have been meted out to the racist white students. When the *New York Times* finally caught up with the Howard story, however, it reported that neither the Jew-baiting law student nor any of the other anti-Semitic speakers that night would be penalized. "We've never had a speech code," a spokeswoman for Howard said, "and we've never screened speakers for content."

Presumably this is true, although it may also be irrelevant. When the late Lee Atwater once tried to speak at Howard, he touched off a university crisis, and students protested en masse. The media had a high old time with that, but insisted that allowances had to be made. Atwater was a white Republican who had worked for George Bush. There is no need for a speech code at Howard or anywhere else where the rules are so thoroughly understood. □

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## Whither Rabin?

by Saul Lewis

In the wake of the Hebron mosque massacre, Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, must be a very angry man. Angry at Dr. Baruch Goldstein, and other followers of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, for bringing shame and disgrace on Israel; angry at Yasir Arafat for abandoning the peace talks and making impossible demands on his government; and angry at himself, above all, for agreeing to shake hands with Arafat on the South Lawn of the White House.

The historic handshake was hailed the world over as a great breakthrough for peace. Everywhere, Arafat and Rabin were praised for burying historic hatreds and building a new Middle East. There was only one thing wrong with this analysis: for Arafat, the handshake was just another maneuver in his ongoing war against Israel. As he made clear in a broadcast to Palestinians on the very day of the handshake, the agreement with Israel was part of the "Phased Plan" adopted by the PLO in 1974: first, establish a foothold in part of "liberated Palestine," then go on to "liberate" the rest of Palestine.

The Israeli government, of course, was aware of this broadcast, but chose to ignore it. And when Arafat failed to live up to his commitments to annul the PLO's charter, which calls for Israel's destruction, or to call for an end to *intifada* violence, all sorts of excuses were offered by Israeli spokesmen: Arafat was weak, he was beset by radicals, let's give him time, he's our only hope, etc.

Yitzhak Rabin went along with this sophistry, but his heart clearly wasn't in it. Finally, he exploded. "I have more faith in [Syrian President] Assad's word than in Arafat's," he told Israeli newsmen. Having been misled time and again by Arafat's soothing assurances, Rabin borrowed a leaf

from the late Menachem Begin's book, and became a great stickler for details. Nothing was to be left to vague "understandings" anymore. Before Rabin withdrew the Israeli army from Gaza and Jericho, the precise nature of Palestinian self-rule would have to be laid out in writing. Arafat would be left with no wiggle-room whatsoever.

Rabin's strategy helped reassure an Israeli public that was growing increasingly disenchanted with the Handshake, but it had one flaw: pinning down the slippery Arafat is a time-consuming process. But with the cessation of all settlement activity, time isn't working in Israel's favor on the West Bank anymore.

Curiously, the Israelis who understood this from the start were the dovish Laborites like foreign minister Shimon Peres and his deputy, Yosi Beilin. In their view, the longer the peace process drags on, the more radicalized everyone becomes: Palestinians, because their self-confidence is growing; Israelis, because their self-confidence is declining. The more time passes, the harder it will be to bridge the gap between an "interim" and a final settlement, and the greater the chance that Likud will come to power and upset the whole applecart. If the Labor Party truly intends to establish Palestinian self-rule, say the doves, then the sooner it does so, the better. In Shakespeare's words, "If it were done. . . then 'twere well it were done quickly."

Into this devilishly complex situation walked Dr. Baruch Goldstein, firing away with his assault rifle. Even before he committed his appalling crime, the mood in West Bank settlements was grim, as Edward Norden pointed out in these pages last month. But in the aftermath of the massacre, a terrible situation has gotten much worse. Not only have relations between Israelis and Palestinians on the West Bank been poisoned, but the

killings appear to have radicalized *Israeli* Arabs as well—the ones who live in Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Galilee, enjoy Israeli citizenship, and vote in Israeli elections. That the Hebron massacre sparked widespread riots among *them* raises the awful prospect of civil strife between Jewish and Arab Israelis somewhere down the road.

But what is Rabin to do? Take the doves' advice, obtain some vague assurances from Arafat about demilitarization, and leave the West Bank as quickly as possible? Knowing the worth of Arafat's assurances as he does, Rabin couldn't possibly favor such a course. But neither does his current strategy of protracted negotiations seem sustainable. The longer the negotiations—and the violence—continue, the greater the likelihood that Israelis will get fed up with the whole business and opt for the opposition.

Under these circumstances, Rabin has done what Israelis, alas, often do when they get into trouble: look to the U.S. for help. Rabin has asked Washington to help Israel "accelerate" the peace process. Washington has replied, predictably, by urging Israel to accelerate the pace of its concessions to the PLO. Unfortunately, peace doesn't depend on Bill Clinton and Warren Christopher, but on Yasir Arafat. And after the Hebron massacre Arafat is proving more slippery than ever.

Ironically, Arafat's position has been gravely complicated by the one Israeli group most sympathetic to his demands: the left. In the aftermath of the massacre, seven out of fifteen members of Israel's cabinet came out in favor of dismantling the Jewish presence in Hebron, but Rabin, fearing that this would give Arafat an opening for further demands, refused to go along. Instead, he co-opted one of Israel's religious parties, Shas, into his government by promising that no settlements would be evacuated in the foreseeable future. Thus, if Arafat returns to the nego-

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