

# LETTERS

*In These Times* is an independent newspaper committed to democratic pluralism and to helping build a popular movement for socialism in the United States. Our pages are open to a wide range of views on the left, both socialist and non-socialist. Except for editorial statements appearing on the editorial page, opinions expressed in columns and in feature or news stories are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the editors. We welcome comments and opinion pieces from our readers.

## IGNORANCE OF HISTORY?

THE MAJORITY OF VOTERS FERVENTLY wish to shed differences and unite in order to defeat Reaganism in November. This common bond can help us succeed if it has a strong conceptual base.

Reaganism is a pseudo-religious form of modern fascism. In no way can its philosophy, methods or goals represent "patriotic Americanism." The horrors Reaganism has in store for the world have only just begun. Unfortunately, ignorance of history makes opposition to Reaganism a largely unwitting anti-fascism, ergo, uncertain in November.

—Roy Kuwahara  
Willingboro, N.J.

## SLIP OF A MIND

THE MAY 16 ISSUE CARRIED A PROVOCATIVE article on anti-Semitism in the black community, but unless Salim Muwakkil is a.k.a. Milton Coleman, its closing reference to Jesse Jackson's use of the term "Hymie" was totally unjust and nasty. Equating Jackson's thoughtless slip in a private conversation with the worst excesses of fundamentalist and nationalist fanatics is the kind of journalism worthy of *People* magazine or *Readers Digest*.

In case Salim and the *ITT* editors have been napping since that remark was made in *January*, they should know that Jackson apologized and was forgiven by many progressive Jews—among them, Barry Commoner—and he then moved on to successful campaigns in places like New York, Washington, D.C., and Mississippi, among others. It is not only the wretchedly bigotted major media who try to keep Jackson on the defensive over that foolish utterance, but the morally righteous and unforgiving leftists who have grown so used to being irrelevant and losing that the potential for a giant step forward leaves them terrified. While

Salim's use of the remark to open his article was understandable, his vicious repeat at the end warrants an apology.

Jackson has courageously put his life on the line in order to bring issues usually discussed in living rooms or among academics to millions of Americans, the legendary masses previously known to progressives only in the abstract or through psychedelic haze. The sometimes rotten treatment his tragically disorganized and underfunded campaign has received from "progressives" says more about our problems in this country than any stupid slip-of-the-mind committed by Jackson.

—Frank Scott  
San Rafael, Calif.

## RESENTFUL CHILDREN?

I HAVE NO QUARREL WITH MOST OF Salim Muwakkil's assessment of black anti-Semitism (*ITT*, May 16), but I think he misses a deeper dimension to the problem.

Muwakkil overlooks the deep strain of hatred against Jews as the people who were the longest friends of blacks. It is the hatred that sometimes characterizes a son's or daughter's relationship to parents, i.e., I don't need you anymore, I don't want you telling me what's good for me, get off my back.

Through the '30s, '40s, '50s and especially the '60s, Jews were often patronizing toward blacks. It was their money that fueled the equal rights struggles; they were often their lawyers, doctors or organizers. In the late '60s some black leaders finally said, "We don't need you anymore."

About that time, Martin Luther King was killed and the cities went up in smoke. The civil rights movement died a terrible death. Many of those responsible for the purge were feeling guilty about it; it helped kill the movement. But facing guilt, admitting it, is never easy: it is easier to turn it around and blame the victim. And from these early

acts—by Harold Cruse, Stokely Carmichael, LeRoi Jones and others—has come down to the young people of today—the intellectuals and the street people—an inheritance of anti-Semitism, propagated by demagogues like Jesse Jackson, an anti-Semitism created not, I suggest, by Jewish merchants, many of whom are fondly recalled by blacks, but by the blacks' resentment (against the Jews) for having had to be, like children, the beneficiaries of Jewish liberalism and generosity in a world where most whites shunned and mistreated blacks.

—Florence H. Levinsohn  
Chicago

## HAVE A HART

PROPOS OPEN PRIMARIES, WHAT A party wheelhorses like Fred Gram regard as Republicans "fouling the Democratic primary," (*ITT*, May 16) I view as an opportunity for independents and Republicans to voice their sentiments and preference on who is to occupy the White House in the next four critical years.

Demographic changes notwithstanding, the country still votes roughly one-third Democratic, one-third Republican and one-third independent; and it's garnering the independent third that decides the outcome.

That is why Democrats, liberals and progressives, working people truly seeking to oust Reagan should be pulling for Gary Hart who has demonstrated widespread support among independents and young voters of both parties.

It's either a rerun of 1968 or 1980 with Mondale (whose mentor Hubert Humphrey was a Vietnam hawk and a loser to boot) or a fighting chance with a fresh voice with new ideas like Gary Hart, who is beholden to the fat cats, party establishment types, political action committees and executive councils that make endorsements for president before primaries and convention without even canvassing the rank and file.

—Irving Gold  
Jupiter, Fla.

## ONE MAN'S FASCIST

OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, *IN THESE Times* has published several articles as background on the remaining three Democratic candidates. From these, I perceive a fondness for Sen. Gary Hart. It seems that all of you are conveniently overlooking two facts: one, Sen. Hart attended (did he graduate?) divinity school; and two, he is a member of the Nazarene Church.

I've no idea how many readers understand those two points. As a young teenager I was forced to attend a Nazarene church. Jerry Falwell loves them. As a gay activist, I can authoritatively advise you that the Nazarene Church is against civil rights, minority rights and women's rights. When has Sen. Hart repudiated those views? Has the leopard changed his spots?

Hart attacks Mondale's Chrysler "bailout" and his advocates point to job losses. If there had been no bailout, all of the jobs at Chrysler plus many support industries would have been lost. Better half the pie than none at all.

Rev. Jesse Jackson rarely receives positive notice. All the media have pounced on him for the "Hymietown" remark. Let me advise you that he did not offend upstate New Yorkers who regard NYC as Rip-off (syn. "Jew" or "Hymie") City. He's the only remaining candidate with a sensible defense (cut it) and foreign policy. We've been giving the store away to Israel, the new fascists.

The columns have remarked that Hart's yuppies will not vote for Mondale. Fine, then let them suffer another four years of Reagan. We want permanent liberals, not fairweather friends who sip Perrier and eat yogurt and wouldn't hit the streets on a bet. Yuppies are made of plastic and polyester. Yuppies? More like "yukkies."

In essence, there is no real difference between Sen. Hart and Ronald Reagan, except party label. New ideas? Where are they? In the fundamentalist Nazarene Church?

—Vernon F. Hall  
Richmondville, N.Y.

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## PERSPECTIVES

*Black journalists rate Farrakhan factor*

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES columnist Vernon Jarrett says black journalists have a duty to report on the black experience, warts and all.

By Salim Muwakkil

**"M**ILTON COLEMAN is a Judas weak-kneed coward Uncle Tom," reads a button being hawked by members of the Nation of Islam (NOI). Coleman is the black *Washington Post* reporter who disclosed Jesse Jackson's "Hymie" gaffe, and who, because of that, was singled out for ostracism by NOI leader Louis Farrakhan. "I'm going to stay on his case until we make him a fit example to the rest of them [black journalists]," Farrakhan said in a nationally broadcast radio address. In that same broadcast Farrakhan also gave his position on black journalists in general. "Don't tell me nothing about you're a reporter," the Black Muslim leader said. "You're just a nigger in the eyes of white people.... You are just a pure chump operative of those that write your stories for you to put it under your byline. If it's too good for black people or too good for your own people, they don't want that kind of story out of you."

The anti-Coleman button is reportedly a big seller in black communities across the country, and Farrakhan's general criticism of black journalists has found a receptive ear among many who believe that black journalists should be advocates, even propagandists, for the cause of black liberation.

But what do black journalists think about all of this? "I find opinion to be very divided on many levels and it all depends on who you talk to," says Mervin Aubespin, president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and a veteran reporter for the Louisville *Courier-Journal*. For the past few weeks Aubespin has been on the road attending forums and symposiums sparked by the Coleman controversy. Recently in Chicago he addressed the Region Six (Midwest) Conference of the NABJ on the issue.

"You just can't tie the response of black journalists about this specific issue into a neat package," Aubespin told *In These Times*. "Many question the ethics of Milton revealing off-the-record remarks. But some black journalists applauded him for holding Jesse accountable for his intemperate remarks. They argue that anyone seeking the highest office in the land—especially one who is running on a 'rainbow coalition' base—has a responsibility to discipline his public and private behavior. And if he doesn't, that's news. Then there are those who soundly condemn Milton for gratuitously

providing Jesse's critics with ammunition. My own opinion is that Jesse shouldn't have said it, Milton shouldn't have revealed it and Farrakhan should have stayed completely out of it."

Aubespin took strong exception to Farrakhan's depiction of black journalists as "chump operatives" who let their bylines appear on stories written by their white editors. "Farrakhan's criticism is absolutely ludicrous. He has no idea how a major newspaper works. He's just trying to intimidate us and this black reporter just won't let that happen. Everyone from redneck sheriffs to Ku Klux Klan henchmen have tried in the past to intimidate me. I didn't let it happen then and I won't be intimidated now by someone who has the audacity to suggest that I'm a traitor to the cause. Who the hell is he to tell me what the cause is? I'm strongly supportive of Jackson's campaign, but that doesn't mean that as a black reporter I have to alter my responsibility to report a story fairly and accurately. We're not in the public relations business and in my opinion we do a big disservice to the black community by covering up the warts."

**Divergent views.**

The NABJ forum, which focused on the problems peculiar to blacks covering blacks, offered evidence that black journalists' opinions on this issue span the spectrum. In addition to Aubespin, the forum panelists included Jay Harris, a columnist for the Gannet News Service, Vernon Jarrett, columnist for the Chicago *Sun-Times* and television commentator, and Charles Sanders, managing editor of *Ebony* magazine.

Sanders said that *Ebony* was frankly in the business of celebrating black achievement and had little interest in tarnishing the image of any black achiever. "We have so few black heroes as it is, we refuse to write anything that may disparage our heroes or damage their reputation."

Harris said the controversy was "greatly overblown" and that Coleman's action was simply a "violation of trust. There are clear rules on whether to violate a professional trust and Coleman violated those rules plain and simple." Harris said he's troubled by the "selective nature of the coverage" Jackson's campaign is receiving in the *Washington Post* and he said Coleman's revelation fit a bit too perfectly into the general mold the paper had already established. "To give the impression that Jesse is an anti-Semite is to give an unfair impression," he said.

Vernon Jarrett, a journalist with a long record of involvement in movement politics, argued that black journalists have a responsibility to the black community

and not to specific black leaders. "There are other sides of the black experience that go way beyond the ups and downs of individual leaders. We have a duty to that community to report what we know, flaws and all. When people charge me with washing our dirty linen in public, I simply ask them if they would prefer another laundry to do it." Jarrett recalls a discussion he had with a certain West German reporter who had neglected to reveal various quirks in the character of the Rev. Jim Jones of Peoples' Temple fame. "If he had done his job, a lot of lives may have been saved."

In an earlier column addressing this issue, Jarrett, who, it must be noted, is a long-time critic of the Rev. Jackson, wrote, "If Coleman had revealed an off-the-record, off-color racial remark by Walter F. Mondale or Sen. Gary Hart, Coleman would be defended and praised by the same people who now attack him."

"Black journalists are caught right in the middle of this controversy," Aubespin noted in his forum remarks. "While some blacks accuse us of too much objectivity, many white editors accuse us of too little. A lot of editors started pulling black reporters off the Jackson campaign after this thing broke. They wanted to know why more of us hadn't reported Jackson's tendency to use such intemperate language. The real shame of this whole episode is that just when black reporters were getting a much needed opportunity to gain experience in covering a national political campaign, this Farrakhan foolishness happens. When an editor catches wind that all you're going to do is report the positive news, they'll quickly get you out of the way. That man [Farrakhan] has hurt the progress we've fought so long to achieve."

Aubespin said this controversy has also served to obscure candidate Jackson's positions on important issues. "I think what happened is that Farrakhan was launched into national prominence at the expense of Jackson's campaign."

**Accountability is an issue.**

But there are those black journalists who believe Farrakhan has a point in holding them accountable for what they write. "We demand accountability from black politicians, business people and entertainers, so we must do the same with black journalists," explained Lu Palmer, a radio commentator, columnist and leader of Chicago Black United Communities (CBUC). "In fact, because a journalist has the awesome powers of words at his disposal, it may be even more important to demand accountability from them. If we don't, then all they

have to guide them is the racist perspective of their white editors. And, believe me, I know that perspective well from my days at the *Chicago Daily News*. Palmer quit that Chicago daily in 1973 because of what he charged was racist coverage of the black community.

"I have ambivalent feelings about all of this, to tell you the truth," said Monroe Anderson, one of two black columnists writing for the *Chicago Tribune*. "Black journalists do have a special responsibility to the black community, and some of us do have to be occasionally reminded of that responsibility. White journalists understand that they have a responsibility to their community and they take care of it very well. However, they expect black journalists to assume the same responsibility without recognizing, at times, that we have different perspectives on certain things."

"On the other hand," Anderson added, "I don't like intimidation. Now, Minister Farrakhan may have been speaking allegorically when he threatened Coleman but remember, Farrakhan made similar threatening statements about Malcolm [X] right before he was assassinated."

Following his forum remarks, Jay Harris told *In These Times* he thought Farrakhan's threats were harmless, rhetorical attempts to let black reporters know that they were being judged by criteria other than that of their white editors. "Too much has been made of his statements," he said. "Whether we like Farrakhan or not, we have to acknowledge that he's a black leader respected by many. As far as Coleman's action, well, I'll simply say this: a lot of black reporters have heard Jesse use some pretty strange language, but only one chose to report it."

Les Payne, a *Newsday* columnist, agreed with Harris. "Milton trashed his source over something that was quite insignificant in the general scale of things. He knows that Jesse's not an anti-Semite and that Hymie remark was just a stylistic quirk of his, a mere slip of his glib tongue. Part of our responsibility as black journalists is to bring our perspective to bear and to fill in the gaps between what the white community thinks about the black community and what our community really is. If we merely pander to their preconceived notions of us, we're not doing our job effectively."

Another part of a black journalist's job is to educate the black community to the dangers of its own racism and double standards, noted Larry Muhammad, assistant managing editor of the *Chicago Defender*, the oldest black newspaper in the country. "How can we expect the respect of the body politic when our most visible political spokesman lacks the sophistication to refrain from calling people crude names?" he wondered. "Our community must realize that we must give respect to get it. Now, I'm not sure if I would have taken Coleman's action, but I don't deny him his right to report what he thinks is important. And I think it's very important that we report the bad as well as the good about our leaders."

"Jesse made a mistake and it appears he's learned from it. The pit is, all of this could have blown over with little rancor had not Farrakhan jumped on the opportunity to boost his currency." In Muhammad's opinion, Farrakhan is simply "playing to the media's proclivity for sensationalism. He subscribes to a racist doctrine and it's about time that we in the black community realize that expressions of racism of any kind are not in our best interest."

Salim Muwakkil writes regularly for *In These Times*.