

Roy Meachum

4-13-88

Jesse



The moveable feast for the media, called the 1988 Presidential Election, has settled in New York this week.

Republicans are already preparing a coronation for George Bush, the darling of none except GOP diehards. What was once the nation's Empire State can now only play me-too in the vice-president's quest for the White House.

Among Democrats, next Tuesday's New York primary, on the other hand, threatens to tear further apart the party created by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In breaking GOP control of the White House, which had endured — minus only the Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson presidencies — since Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election, Mr. Roosevelt forged a mighty coalition of the nation's have-nots. Since the New Deal, minorities formed the Democrats' steady backbone, especially Jews and blacks whose religion and color prevented their absorption into the American mainstream — as happened with the Irish and other ethnic groups.

Their differences generally caused blacks and Jews to support each other, even when partisan politics were not involved. Jews fought and bled in the Civil Rights wars. They provided a companion idealism and manpower as well as money to help Martin Luther King. Their voices were foremost among America's non-blacks in seeking corrective legislation to end segregation and to promote human rights.

Troubles between the two minorities began when the heat of the Civil Rights wars was most intense. Blacks wanted to stand on their own. All whites were pushed to the back of the movement's leadership. Jews found themselves nudged aside, along with Catholic and Protestant clergy and other "enlightened" whites who had spent decades laboring in the ghettos and tenant shacks.

Because they felt, not without justice, that their support had been both vital and critical, more so than other whites, some Jews reacted with anger to their expulsion from leadership positions.

Do not misunderstand: In my view, Dr. King and his colleagues were absolutely right. How could blacks ever achieve the dignity of free men and women if their freedom remained dependent on other people?

In spite of the frictions, the Jewish-

black coalition remained intact. Well into the 1980s, it constituted the single most reliable element in the Democratic Party, long after the Solid South was recognized as the myth it always was on the national scene. GOP President Ronald Reagan enjoys no more loyal followers in any other part of the country.

In a worst case scenario, the 20th century may never again see a Democrat in the Oval Office after next Tuesday's New York primaries.

Unlike voters in earlier balloting, New Yorkers face a single issue, one guaranteed to have repercussions into the future.

In New York, the candidacy of Jesse Jackson has become the target for vituperative attacks from segments — not all — of the state's Jewish community. The reason has to do with Mr. Jackson's embrace of the Palestinian cause.

Of all the candidates, in both parties, the black politician was alone in criticizing Israeli handling of the current uprising in the occupied territories. However, Mr. Jackson has remained steadfast over the years in calling for a Palestinian homeland as the only way peace can ever come to the Middle East.

It is possible to suspect that Jesse Jackson might be forgiven past stupidities and omissions were the Palestinian issue not on the international front burner. Certainly any Jew who has called a black a *shvartzer* — Yiddish for nigger — could forgive, if not forget, the candidate's 1984 description of New York as "Hymietown" in a conversation with a black reporter. His failure to repudiate black hate-merchant Louis Farrakahn the same year cannot be explained so easily. However, Mr. Jackson now makes clear that all ties with Mr. Farrakahn were cut several years ago. And that stated position might be enough, under other circumstances.

At any rate, New York Mayor Ed Koch and other Jewish leaders have gone to some lengths to whip up sentiment against Jesse Jackson. They were helped by the desperation tactics of Sen. Albert Gore Jr., hoping to win enough votes next week to qualify for the federal funding that would keep him in the

race.

Instead, Sen. Gore sullied his own candidacy and destroyed any pretensions he might have to the second spot on the Democratic ticket. Polls show he picked up virtually no support for encouraging Jews to consider Mr. Jackson as anti-Semitic.

At the present time, New York appears certain to hand another victory to Mass. Gov. Michael Dukakis and Mr. Jackson should be a strong runner-up. If those projected results hold true, Sen. Gore must summon up whatever remains of his basic decency and head back to the Tennessee hills, never again to raise his head for national office.

Heading for the Atlanta convention, the Democrats have no other choice but to offer the vice-presidency slot to Jesse Jackson. He has earned the right to accept or refuse. His nomination would doubtless upset many voters, even though surveys show a Dukakis-Jackson ticket could beat a George Bush slate. I believe that's true.

Still, in the process of winning the White House, it is possible to foresee the Democrats would lose a number of the Jewish votes that have been theirs since FDR days. But that is not the worst of the party's present dilemma.

By attacking Mr. Jackson for his stand on Palestinian human rights, Mayor Koch and his cohorts have driven a permanent wedge between the nation's Jews and blacks. Even blacks who do not fully trust Mr. Jackson — and there are some — resent his "tarring" over a matter that has nothing to do with them and their aspirations for the future.

Israel and its problems have been thrust into the heart of America's domestic politics, where it has never belonged. Not only blacks, but many whites, including some Jews, are becoming disaffected with this country's manipulation on behalf of a foreign nation, particularly in the light Israel has cast itself by brutalizing Palestinian demonstrators.

Of course, the possibility exists that Mr. Jackson will not be offered the vice presidential nomination. He might refuse. Either prospect must be viewed with alarm. In either case, Mayor Koch and his cohorts may be too smart to claim credit, but they will certainly get the blame.

In that event, I fear the nation's basic black-white relationship will be affected. But a considerable body of a black anger will be aimed at Jews, whatever happens. What a shame! America's dark days continue.