

In my own time, in my own career, according to the limits of my own perception and my experience, the most difficult thing, the most treacherous thing, I would hazard, about being an American white man who is of Jewish inheritance, the most difficult thing, I would think, would be to accept that inheritance, which is a mighty one, as distinguished from and as opposed to the American inheritance. Because the most awful thing about the black American relationship to Jews, to the American Jew, is that the black American singles out the American Jew because so much of the black inheritance comes from the Old and New Testament. So much of our imagery, "Let My People Go," all of those legends black people have lived with and made real up until this hour, and that means that unconsciously a black person tends to expect more from a Jewish person than he expects from anybody else. And because the American Jew in this country is essentially a white man, this expectation is always defeated with a resulting accumulation of bitterness, because the American Jew is acting on the minor inheritance and rejecting the major one.

You will observe that in the American inheritance, and you will presently turn the tables on me, correct me if you think I'm wrong, but in the American inheritance insofar as I have been able to read it, and insofar as I've had to make it my own, there is no suggestion of morality. The American inheritance is essentially an inheritance which is called opportunity; and in execution of this opportunity, it doesn't matter what principle or what human being is in the way.

--James Baldwin, "Blacks and Jews." Lecture at the University of Amherst, Feb. 28, 1984.

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