

Thoughts From The HEART

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1900 HRS:

"FINDING - MY - PLACE"
PART I

THE SECURITY PERSONNEL OF EL AL AIRLINES DESCENDED UPON ME AT TEL AVIV INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. LIKE A FLOCK OF VULTURES. THERE WERE SEVEN OF THEM IN UNIFORM, BLOCKADING THE CUSTOM COUNTER. I WAS PREPARED FOR THEIR INITIAL QUESTION, "WHY ARE YOU COMING TO ISRAEL?" TO FIND FAMILY MEMBERS. WHAT DO YOU MEAN FAMILY MEMBERS? I EXPLAINED TO THEM, I WAS BORN HERE, MY MOTHER IS JEWISH, THEN I HANDED THEM A RECORD OF BIRTH FROM A JERUSALEM HOSPITAL. WHAT RACE IS YOUR FATHER? "BLACK" OF COURSE; WHERE ARE YOUR FATHER'S PEOPLE FROM? "THE STATE OF NEW YORK," BEFORE THAT. YOUR FATHER'S ANCESTORS. WHERE DID THEY COME FROM? TRINIDAD AND BARBADOES. I STATED...

Why Do You WEAR That uniform? Because I
AM A MEMBER OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES.
AND PROUD OF MY ARMED FORCES I.O. THEY ONCE
AGAIN ASKED WHAT'S YOUR MOTHER'S JEWISH NAME?
LOOK AT THE RECORD OF BIRTH IT'S ON THERE.
FROM PASSPORT TO I.D. TO RECORD OF BIRTH,
QUESTIONS... I FELT CAUGHT IN A LOOP OF THAT
ABBOTT AND COSTELLO ROUTINE, "WHO'S ON
FIRST?" THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR ME INSIDE
THAT RHETORIC. I DIDN'T HAVE THE RIGHT
VOCABULARY. I DIDN'T HAVE THE RIGHT PEDIGREE.
THIS IS WHAT MY MIXED RACE HAS MADE ME:
A PERPETUAL UNANSWERED QUESTION. THIS IS
WHAT THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE HAS MADE ME:
A MONGREL AND A - [REDACTED] THREAT TO MY MOTHER'S
HOMELAND. DO YOU SPEAK HEBREW?? NO BUT
I DO SPEAK "YIDDISH". THEN I GAVE THEM
THE "FICKEL FINGER OF FAITH"; IT MEANS
"FUCK YOU"... "YOU GO", "YOU GO NOW". THIS WAS
THE FIRST TIME I'D EVER BEEN RACIALLY PRO-
FILED, NOT THAT THE EXPERIENCE WOULD HAVE
BEEN LESS HUMILIATING HAD IT BEEN MY TEN
HUNDREDTH. NOT BECAUSE THEY'D STRIPPED ME
OF MY JEWISHNESS AND DIGNITY, BUT BECAUSE
THEY'D SHVED MY FACE INTO MY OWN ROOT-
LESSNESS. I WAS ALSO ^{TOLD} NOT TO WEAR MY UNIFORM
WHITE HERE. FOR MY OWN SAFETY.

FINDING my cousin, she asked what took so long?? I explained to her what had happen - she smiled. They just wanted to know if you were part of "BETA ISRAEL" which are ^{the} ETHIOPIAN JEWS OR THE BLACK HEBREWS FROM THE UNITED STATES who ARE SQUATTING IN THE DESERT - THEY call themselves AFRICAN HEBREW ISRAELITES AND SEE THEMSELVES AS THE ORIGINAL JEWS WHICH HAVE BEEN CURSED BY HAM'S. THEY call themselves THE KINGDOM OF YAH AND LIVE IN THE NEGRO DESERT, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALLOWED THEM TO LIVE THERE AND HAS GIVEN THEM RESIDENCY STATUS.

I'll take you to see both sects. IT was GETTING DARK AND WE HAD TO HURRIED. FOR IT was Friday. I was given the honor to RECITE THE HEBREW BLESSINGS AT THE SHABBAT DINNER: "BARUCH ATAH ADONAI, ELOHEINU MELECH HA'OLAM . . ." AS we ate my mind took me back to the summer's I spent with my father family and the place I went back too before coming here. "HARLEM" was shifting. IT DIDN'T MATTER THAT I BELONGED halfway TO THE RACE BEING SLOWLY SQUEEZED OUT OF MANHATTAN'S FINAL FRONTIER OF AFFORDABLE REAL ESTATE. AS much as I hated to

watch the sad, slow effect of gentrification
spill over the stately brownstones of sugar
hill and striver's row, home of madam c.j.
walker and langston hughes and all those wild
jazzmen, I couldn't pretend, that I wasn't
a member of the gentry. I myself was not
disinherited. I had never wanted for anything.

I didn't know the feeling of hunger or homelessness.
I began to feel my mother's whiteness, and I
was ashamed...; I meandered through harlem and
beyond: northward to the cloisters of fort tyon
park, eastward to the movable macombs dam bridge
and into the bronx, westward over the washington
bridge across the dirty hudson, southward down
the long finger of manhattan. on one of these
rambles, in the shadow of the elevated sub-
way tracks off 125th street, I stumbled upon a
short stretch of alley-way, old broadway. and
there, in the middle of the alley, stood a small,
sweet shul with a dirty facade and bricked
up windows. here was harlem's last remaining
synagogue. I stopped in front of it, and
felt for some reason, that I had been here
before. it was Friday night and the sun was
setting. slowly I pushed open the heavy
door, "welcome!" cried out an old black man
in a kippah. "good shabbos." another, wandering
Jew has found their way home.