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Anti-Semitism

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - ANTI-SEMITISM
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I am not a social media person, and, so at times, things slip by me that I should know about. In the past few weeks, I found myself playing catch-up on the uproar set off by DeSean Jackson's tweets. Jackson mistakenly thought he was quoting Hitler in his anti-Semitic blast. Steven Jackson, no relation to DeSean, supported DeSean with his own splash of anti-Semitic material. Both men followed up with tributes to the wisdom of Louis Farrakhan, regarded by many as the current leader of anti-Semitism in the world.

So, we are now heading down a familiar road as the movement for social justice for African Americans gets tainted with anti-Semitic rhetoric of a most deplorable nature. This has happened before. The Civil Rights Movement of the 60s saw a similar loss of focus on the main message among some within the movement. The resulting tension between the African American and Jewish communities blurred the focus of many and led some Jewish supporters of the movement to pull back their commitment to it.

I missed the opening shots by DeSean Jackson and the reaction to his comments. I first became aware of any of this while listening to Mitch Albom on the "Sports Reporters" podcast in which he denounced Jackson's tweets and wondered why no one from the NFL or the Philadelphia Eagles had punished Jackson, condemned his comments, or even said much about them.

Albom followed this with an editorial in the *Detroit Free-Press* on July 12 offering the Jacksons a history lesson and wondering where all the spokespersons for racial justice were at this time of anti-racism. It is an editorial well worth reading.

Adding to the public controversy, Malcolm Jenkins of the New Orleans Saints, an outspoken supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement called the row over anti-Semitism a "distraction." He said that Jewish people were not his problem, nor a problem for African Americans. "We've got a lot of work to do, and this ain't it."

Mitch Albom was not the only one in the sports community to react. Most notable was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in his regular *Hollywood Reporter* column. Abdul-Jabbar denounced the anti-Semitic comments, but also the lack of massive outrage over the comments. He found this development a bad omen for the future of the Black Lives Matter movement and warned about what he termed "the coming "Apatholypse: apathy to all forms of social justice." He wrote that the level of ignorance on display in the tweets would not be entertained by anyone with a "middle school grasp of reason." He then called out Ice Cube for his ten day anti-Semitic twitter rant.

Abdul-Jabbar reviewed the history of anti-Semitism and concluded by citing Martin Luther King Jr. "'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.' So, let's act like it. If we're going to be outraged by injustice, let's be outraged by injustice against anyone."

For his efforts, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was denounced by Ice Cube with a nasty "thirty pieces of silver" reference. Ice Cube's comments led Jamele Hill to enter the fray condemning anti-Semitism and defending Kareem in *The Atlantic*. Hill included an examination of the persistent strain of anti-Semitism within the African Community. She went on to say that the movement for liberty and equality cannot come at the expense of other marginalized communities and especially at this time of rising hate crimes against the Jewish American community.

Michael Fletcher in *The Undefeated*, a website owned by ESPN that "explores the intersection of sport, race, and culture" also reviewed the controversy and examined the strains in the relationship between these two American communities that have so much in common and so much at stake in the area of civil rights. Fletcher acknowledged this troubled relationship and believes that the popularity of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam remains a major point of tension between the communities.

Fletcher warns that it is important that this outbreak of anti-Semitism not be allowed to side-track the present struggle for equal justice. As it was true in previous movements of earlier decades, it remains essential to "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize."

So, we see one of the basic tensions of American history and culture being played out within the world of protest by

prominent professional athletes. It is not surprising, as it has happened before and may happen again. What is important is for all people of good will to recognize the weaknesses inherited from the past and embedded in the culture, so that we can meet the manifestations of such racial stereotyping and deal with them accordingly.

To rephrase Malcolm Jenkin's comment, we do have a lot of work to do, and, *this is it*.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't need to be a good sport to be bad loser.

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