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## **Will Whistle-Stopping in Israel Work?**

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By Mitchell Moss

Travel abroad is one of the duties of the Mayor of New York. Traditionally, Ireland, Italy and Israel were required stops in order to convey a mayor's support - if not affection - for ethnic groups based in this city. As our population has changed, Puerto Rico and Africa have been added to the itinerary. This weekend, Mayor Dinkins is scheduled to visit Israel to demonstrate his continuing commitment to Israel and the Jewish community. It's an especially timely trip in view of the forthcoming state report on what he and the police did and did not do during the riots in Crown Heights.

Dinkins, one of the few black leaders to have denounced Louis Farrakhan, is fighting hard for Jewish votes in part because of questions surrounding Crown Heights. However, the problems he faces with Jewish voters as he runs for reelection stem less from his actions or inactions than from a fundamental realignment occurring within the Jewish community of New York City.

Just over one million Jews live in New York City, according to a 1991 study by the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. While the number of Jews declined by 7.9 percent between 1981 and 1991, the most important shift has been not in the size but in the composition of the community. Based on the UJA-Federation study, two-thirds of New York City's Jews live in Manhattan and Brooklyn. The Jews who once lived in the Bronx and Queens are moving to the

suburbs, retiring to Florida, or aging out. While the largest number of Jews is located in Brooklyn - with 371,000 - their density is higher in Manhattan, where one of five residents is Jewish. According to the UJA-Federation study, Jews accounted for most of Manhattan's population increase in the past decade.

Although Jews still play a prominent role in the engines of New York's economy - culture, fashion, communications, finance and health care - their political presence has clearly diminished. Last year, New York City lost four Jewish Congressmen: Green and Solarz were defeated, Scheuer retired, and Weiss died in office. Only one of the newcomers, Jerry Nadler, is Jewish. At the state level, with the exception of Attorney General Robert Abrams, Jews are remarkably absent from elective office. In fact, Jews have had a recent string of failures in statewide races: Koch, Holtzman, Abrams, Myerson, Abzug. Within New York City, the most prominent remaining Jewish politicians, Charles Schumer, Liz Holtzman and Ruth Messinger, are rarely regarded as "Jewish leaders" in the way that, say, Assemblyman Dov Hikind is.

It is not an accident that Crown Heights is the focal point of Mayor Dinkins' problems with the Jewish community. Jews live in comparative harmony with Latinos and blacks in Manhattan, where the Jewish community is affluent, politically liberal, highly educated and culturally assimilated. By contrast, the Jewish community of Brooklyn is more religious, with a heavy concentration of Orthodox and Hasidic Jews. Moreover, a recent study prepared for the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty indicates that two-thirds of the 145,000 Jews in New York City living in poverty reside in Brooklyn.

The differences between the Jewish communities are even reflected in the role of the rabbinate. The Reform and Conservative rabbis of Manhattan tend to stick to their pulpits, while Orthodox rabbis are more politically engaged and skilled at mobilizing support in the streets and at the polls.

As the mayor departs for Israel, it is clear one can no longer speak of a singular "Jewish community" in New York City. Rather, the Jews of New York, while sharing a deep commitment to this city, have very different perspectives on religious, social and political issues. Not even identification with Israel is the paramount and unifying issue it once was within the Jewish community. Perhaps we need to rethink the mayor's job as global ambassador; travel abroad may be a

luxury rather than a path to political redemption.

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