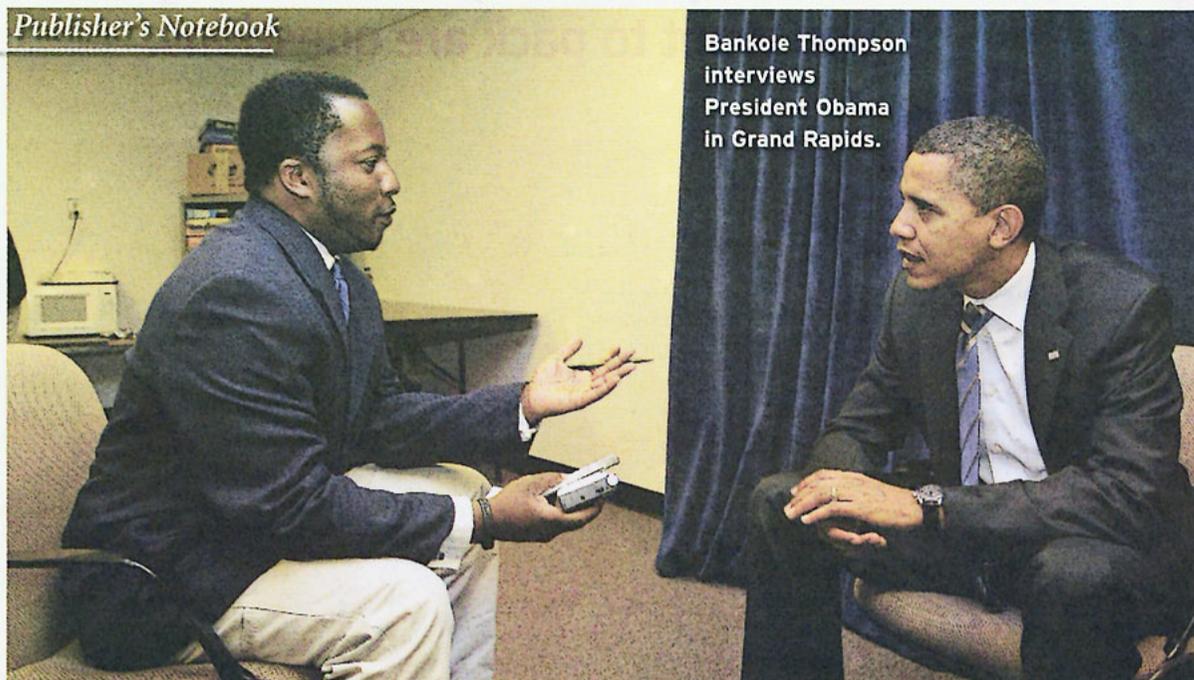


Publisher's Notebook



Bankole Thompson interviews President Obama in Grand Rapids.

Updated Engagement Model To Drive Black-Jewish Forum

In the course of my 25 years publishing the *Detroit Jewish News*, there have been an array of initiatives and projects intended to more closely link our African-American and Jewish communities. These have run the gamut, from annual Martin Luther King commemorations to volunteers reading to Detroit Public Schools children, from collaborations between individual churches and synagogues to mini-missions to Israel.

Virtually all have the common threads of being initiated by the Jewish community and being framed by the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and the 1967 Detroit riot/uprising.

Over the decades, as the focus of the African-American community has shifted to other pressing concerns, including public safety, drugs, male incarceration, education, employment and family structure, most Jewish community organizations and synagogues continue to initiate and build relationships via the shared struggle for civil rights.

In essence, we wanted the African-American community to continue to view Jews as a caring subset of "whites" who understood slavery and discrimination, and who were hard-wired to repair the world. Keeping the struggle for civil rights at the top of our agenda

allowed us to do so even if the African-American community had moved on.

Bridge Building

It is this backdrop that now frames an emerging initiative between the African-American and Jewish communities. The Black-Jewish Forum, to be launched next Wednesday, Oct. 26, at Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Township, has the potential to refocus, renew and strengthen relations between our communities — with the economic, social and political revitalization of Detroit and Southeastern Michigan the common denominator.



Arthur M. Horwitz

Part of what will make this forum and followup unique is it was imagined, conceived and is being driven by Bankole Thompson, an influential and respected voice in the African-American community.

Thompson, the youthful senior editor of the Detroit-based *Michigan Chronicle* (the state's leading African-American news media outlet), recognizes that for Detroit and the region to rebound, the Jewish community must reclaim the disproportional role it once played in providing leadership, ideas, investment and personal engagement.

Modern Influence

The icons of the civil rights movement inform Bankole's vision for an

updated model of a Black-Jewish coalition (he often quotes Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Congressman John Lewis in his columns). However, Bankole also sees a new generation of blacks and Jews who are neither living in the past nor personally traumatized by the 1967 riot/uprising.

He sees members of the Jewish community, such as Dan Gilbert, passionately driving economic development in Detroit. He sees the remarkable handiwork of Ben Falik, Noam Kimmelman, Miriam Liebman, Oren Goldenberg and other Jewish 20-somethings touching and transforming the lives of individual Detroiters. He sees the work of Jewish volunteers, young and old, committed to fighting poverty and illiteracy. He sees a Jewish community that needs a more vital Detroit to retain many of its best and brightest while attracting new talent who would find the quality of life and Jewish life in the region appealing.

While Bankole is deeply committed to Detroit and the metropolitan area, he is a prolific writer and author who has a national following that includes President Barack Obama (Thompson has written *Obama and Black Loyalty* and has another book to be published in January of 2012 entitled *Obama and Jewish Loyalty*.) His dream is to develop and refine a new model of black-Jewish collaboration and share it with communities across

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Editorial

Why Did Biden Attack Pollard?

President Obama wants Vice President Joe Biden to assuage Jewish voters during next year's re-election campaign. That's hard to reconcile given Biden saying that if it were up to him, Israeli agent Jonathan Pollard would stay in jail for life.

Biden, thanks to his foreign policy record in the U.S. Senate, is considered a staunch supporter of Israel. But he's completely out of touch if he thinks his strident stance on the contentious issue of Pollard's sentencing will resonate with Jews. His campaign job is to court Jewish Democrats as well as the party's core, assuring them the Obama administration is a loyal friend of Israel.



Jonathan Pollard

Many U.S. House representatives, high-ranking former U.S. government officials as well as a host of well-respected political and Jewish leaders have implored Obama to extend clemency to Pollard, a former civilian intelligence analyst for the U.S. Navy now serving a life sentence for passing classified information to Israel. Pollard was arrested in 1985 and sentenced two years later. He is the only person in U.S. history to receive a life sentence for disclosing classified information to an American ally.

"President Obama was considering clemency, but I told him, 'Over my dead body are we going to let him out before his time,'" Biden said in a Sept. 23 meeting with 15 rabbis in Boca Raton, Fla., according to the *New York Times*. The *Jewish Week* in New York reported that Biden referred to Pollard as a "traitor."

Four years ago, according to JTA, Biden, then a senator from Delaware, reportedly said in a Shalom TV interview that he favored commutation (not just a pardon) — which would vacate the conviction of the serious crime of spying. It's unclear what changed Biden's mind other than the troubling notion that he's the fall guy for Obama, who, in this scenario, is against commutation but doesn't want to be the frontline opponent. A 2010 U.S. House letter to Obama pointed to the "great disparity from the standpoint of justice between the amount of time Mr. Pollard has served and the time served — or not served at all — by many others who were found guilty of similar activity on behalf of nations adversarial to us, unlike Israel."

Unmistakably, time served should be measured against the established time line for such a conviction. Pollard, now 57, committed a felony, took money for his illegal actions, was found guilty, expressed remorse and has paid a fair price — 25 years. The median sentence for such a crime is two years in prison; the maximum punishment is now 10 years.

Biden has agreed to meet with a small, hand-picked group of Jewish leaders to discuss Pollard, who recently underwent successful kidney surgery. Meanwhile, if Obama doesn't step up and rebuke Biden's attack on Pollard, chances are he agrees with the vice president. □