

Countering White Nationalism and Antisemitism

How does a better understanding of the connection between antisemitism and anti-Black racism help us keep ourselves and others safe?

Racism functions in our communities on multiple levels. As Dr. Sophie Bjork-James highlights in her research, overt, explicit racial hate is a growing force within White nationalist movements, which has an increasing reach due to social media. This workshop will explore the necessity of addressing antisemitism as a “backbone of White supremacy” in order to stop the spread of racial hate-based violence.

GOALS

- Participants will be exposed to information about the rise in hate crimes.
- Participants will explore the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Black racism in White nationalist thought.
- Participants will learn about the origin, content, and inherent problems of “replacement theory.”
- Participants will consider strategies for their own involvement in reducing hate.

MATERIALS

- Hate Crimes video, Dr. Sophie Bjork-James
<https://vimeo.com/784649510/57604d2336>
- Replacement Theory video, Dr. Sophie Bjork-James
<https://vimeo.com/784649966/ea162970e8>
- Appendix A: Skin in the Game Handout

LESSON

Welcome and go around: Name, pronouns, and what drew you to this program?: 10 minutes)

Introductory Concept: Hate crimes are on the rise (20 minutes)

Resource: Bjork-James' Hate Crime [video](#)

- In discussion, crowd-source the main points:
 - Hate crime numbers are growing
 - Hate crime numbers are way under-reported
 - Community groups are working on reporting more; there are ways to get involved
- Collect some reactions to the videos

Section closure and transition: Stopping hate crimes requires understanding the motivation behind these crimes and understanding our own positionality and motivation for combatting the ideologies that cause them.

Understanding the role of antisemitism in White nationalist ideology: 20 minutes

This section centers on an excerpt from the pivotal essay “Skin in the Game” by Eric Ward. It is followed by a series of discussion questions to facilitate deeper understanding of Ward’s points.

Before turning to the handout, introduce the writer: Bio: Eric K. Ward, Executive Vice President of Race Forward, is a nationally-recognized expert on the relationship between authoritarian movements, hate violence, and preserving inclusive democracy. In his 30+ year civil rights career, Ward has worked with community groups, government and business leaders, human rights advocates, and philanthropy as an organizer, director, program officer, consultant, and board member. He is the author of multiple written works credited with key narrative shifts, including “Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism.”

Read aloud as a group, or have participants pair up to read and discuss

Putting Ward in Context: Introduction to the “Replacement” Conspiracy Theory: 20 minutes

Ward explained how White nationalists think Jews are a threat. Why do White nationalists perceive an existential threat to Whiteness? We will now put White nationalist antisemitism in the broader context of the conspiracy theory known as “replacement theory.”

Watch Bjork-James’ short [video](#) on Replacement Theory to better understand this mindset.

Discussion Questions:

- In your own words, what is “replacement theory”? What are White nationalists concerned about?
- How does the concept of Jews as a race fit into the threat that “replacement theorists” are concerned about?
- What is zero-sum thinking? Why and how is this kind of thinking deeply flawed? What evidence do you have against it—from your life or from other things you’ve learned in this class/other parts of the curriculum?

Closing reflection questions and action activities: 10 minutes

(These reflections can be done through individual journaling, partner discussion, or full group discussion, depending on size and context of group.)

Facing the virulence of explicit antisemitism within White nationalism can be motivating as well as destabilizing. Participants may reflect in writing or in small groups on the following prompts: From all that you’ve encountered in this workshop, what is one point that will stay with you, or that you want to keep thinking about? Why is it important to you?

- Prof. Bjork-James encourages us to get involved in the work of tracking hate crimes and building multicultural coalitions as ways to fight back against White nationalism.

Race, Religion & American Judaism

- Take a few minutes to look up groups doing this work in your area. What are they working on? How might you get involved?
- How will the material you encountered in this workshop shape your action to fight against white nationalist ideology moving forward?

Excerpt from “Skin in the Game,” by Eric K. Ward

Ward highlights two reasons to address antisemitism as a force within white nationalism. Note that in explaining White nationalist ideology, Ward simultaneously assumes that Jews are, or can be seen as, White, ignoring the reality of Jewish racial and ethnic diversity.

The successes of the civil rights movement created a terrible problem for White supremacist ideology. White supremacism—inscribed de jure by the Jim Crow regime and upheld de facto outside the South—had been the law of the land, and a Black-led social movement had toppled the political regime that supported it. How could a race of inferiors have unseated this power structure through organizing alone? For that matter, how could feminists and LGBTQ people have upended traditional gender relations, leftists mounted a challenge to global capitalism, Muslims won billions of converts to Islam? How do you explain the boundary-crossing allure of hip hop? The election of a Black president? Some secret cabal, some mythological power, must be manipulating the social order behind the scenes. This diabolical evil must control television, banking, entertainment, education, and even Washington, D.C. It must be brainwashing White people, rendering them racially unconscious. What is this arch-nemesis of the White race, whose machinations have prevented the natural and inevitable imposition of white supremacy? It is, of course, the Jews. Jews function for today’s White nationalists as they often have for antisemites through the centuries: as the demons stirring an otherwise changing and heterogeneous pot of lesser evils.

This brings me to the second reason that White nationalist antisemitism must not be dismissed: at the bedrock of the movement is an explicit claim that Jews are a race of their own, and that their ostensible position as White folks in the U.S. represents the greatest trick the devil ever played.

Contemporary antisemitism, then, does not just enable racism, it also is racism, for in the White nationalist imaginary Jews are a race—the race—that presents an existential threat to Whiteness. Moreover, if antisemitism exists in glaring form at the extreme edge of political discourse, it does not exist in a vacuum; as with every form of hateful ideology, what is explicit on the margins is implicit in the center, in ways we have not yet begun to unpack. This means the notion that Jews long ago and uncontestedly became White folks in the U.S.—became, in effect, post-racial—is a myth that we must dispel.

Comprehension Questions:

- What problem did the successes of the civil rights movement (and other social change movements) create for White supremacist ideology?
 - How did White supremacist ideology solve this problem?
 - In White nationalist ideology, what is the specific role that Jews play?
- According to Ward, why is it important to recognize that White nationalists consider Jews to be “a race of their own”?
- In your own words, what are Ward’s two reasons that antisemitism should not be ignored in the fight against racism more generally?

Discussion questions:

- What are the implications of White nationalism racializing white-presenting Jews as non-white? What “threat” are White nationalists concerned about?
- In the context of White nationalism that imagines Jews as a racial enemy, what is the best way to refer to Jews who look White? How can we address antisemitism and White nationalism without rendering the racial diversity of Jews invisible?
 - How do you feel about referring to white-appearing Jews?
 - Does context matter? If so, how?
- How do you feel about centering the fight against antisemitism within the broader fight against racism?

Eric K. Ward, *Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism*

<https://politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism>