

Chevruta Text Study on Antisemitism

“To recognize that anti-Semitism is not a sideshow to racism within White nationalist thought is important for at least two reasons. First, it allows us to identify the fuel that White nationalist ideology uses to power its anti-Black racism, its contempt for other people of color, and its xenophobia—as well as the misogyny and other forms of hatred it holds dear. White nationalists in the United States perceive the country as having plunged into unending crisis since the social ruptures of the 1960s supposedly dispossessed White people of their very nation. 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 anti-Semites through the centuries: as the demons stirring an otherwise changing and heterogeneous pot of lesser evils.”

- Skin in the game - Eric K. Ward

“ In other words, when I’m asked, “Where is the anti-Semitism?,” what I am often really being asked is, “Why should we be talking about anti-Semitism?”

And indeed—why? Why, when the president of the United States appears bent on removing as many dark-skinned immigrants from the U.S. as he can, and when men who look like me are shot in the street or tortured to death in prison with impunity? Why, when the leadership of some mainstream Jewish communal organizations level false charges of anti-Semitism in order to silence critique—whether by Jews or non-Jews—of Israeli government policies? Why, after decades of soul-searching by Jewish anti-racists has established a seeming consensus that Jews—with Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews posited as an exception—should regard themselves as White allies of people of color, eschewing any identity as a racialized people with their own skins at risk in the fight against White supremacy? Why, when Jews are safe and claims to the contrary serve to justify rather than to challenge racial and other oppressions, like conservative commentator Alan Dershowitz’s cynical recent attempt to discredit antiracist and anti-colonial struggles by declaring intersectionality an anti-Semitic concept? Why, when Jews of European descent are supposedly “White,” have long been, will ever be?

I can answer this question as I have been doing and will continue to do: anti-Semitism fuels White nationalism, a genocidal movement now enthroned in the highest seats of American power, and fighting anti-Semitism cuts off that fuel for the sake of all marginalized communities under siege from the Trump regime and the social movement that helped raise it up. To refuse to deal with any ideology of domination, moreover, is to abet it. Contemporary social justice movements are quite clear that to refuse antiracism is an act of racism; to refuse feminism is an act of sexism. To refuse opposition to anti-Semitism, likewise, is an act of anti-Semitism. Arguably, not much more should need to be said than that. But I suspect that much more does need to be said. To the hovering question, why should we be talking about anti-Semitism, I reply, what is it we are afraid we will find out if we do? What historic and contemporary conflicts will be laid bare? And if we recognize that White privilege really is privilege, what will it mean for Jewish antiracists to give up the fantasy that they ever really had it to begin with?”

- Skin in the game - Eric K. Ward

“Meet the Amazing, Disappearing Oppression

Anti-Jewish oppression has been around a long time - it became government practice in Christian society about 1,700 years ago and only stopped having official Vatican approval in 1965. But when anti-Jewish oppression isn't at its most brutal, it can be really hard to see. How come this oppression can seem so invisible?

Partly it's that it allows Jews success. Many oppressions rely on keeping a targeted group of people poor, uneducated, designated non-white, or otherwise 'at the bottom.' Anti-Jewish oppression doesn't depend on that. Although at many times it has kept Jews in poverty or designated non-white, these have been “optional” features. Because the point of anti-Jewish oppression is to keep a Jewish face in front, so that Jews, instead of ruling classes, become the target for peoples' rage, it works even more smoothly when Jews are allowed some success, and can be perceived as the ones “in charge” by other oppressed groups.

Partly it's that it moves in cycles. Because it can allow Jews to 'move up,' anti-Semitism is cyclical: Attacks come in waves; but each time things calm down and Jews are able to blend in or succeed in society again, it gives the appearance that anti-Semitism is 'over.' In some of the most famous examples of anti-Jewish expulsion and mass murder (ie, medieval Spain or modern Germany), just prior to the attacks, Jews appeared to be one of society's most successful, comfortable, well-integrated minorities.”

- **The past didn't go anywhere - April Rosenblum**

“We see the Right acting appalled at anti-Semitism, and think of it as a Right-wing issue. We don't realize, the Right got to take it because the Left was silent.

We see the Left not taking on anti-Jewish oppression, and we assume that means it's not a significant social justice issue. **We forget that every oppressed group we talk about today** - people of color, women, queers - got on the agenda only after they **fought like hell** against the established voices of the Left to show that **their oppression mattered**. The Old Left's perspective that all struggles were second to the class struggle meant all kinds of groups were shut up, dismissed and disrespected... all in the name of unity for the revolution.

Things have begun to change only due to the struggles and contributions of Black people asserting their autonomy and building independent liberation movements, feminists, womanists who forced the white-dominated feminist movement to face its racism, the American Indian Movement, Chicano/as, queers, and so many others on the New Left who, empowered by their examples, asserted rights to space, respect and support from others.

The Left's problem of silencing oppressed groups comes in part from how Western European gentile revolutionaries responded to oppressed groups on their home turf. When French Revolutionaries looked at the Jews, who had, for fourteen centuries, suffered violence, expulsions, poverty and locked ghettos, and decided to liberate them, a century of debates began in Western Europe about whether to grant equal rights to Jews.

But no matter how passionately Christian Europeans discussed freedom, equality and human rights, **they assumed that to be free, equal and human meant looking and acting like them**. Jews might be permitted their religion, but they'd be expected to trade in Jewish languages, clothing and distinctive cultures if they wanted real membership in the superior culture that was European civilization.”

- **The Past didn't go anywhere - April Rosenblum**

Racism and anti-Semitism collude to undermine movements for justice and liberation.

Racism and anti-Semitism exploit racial and ethnic differences, and promote class anxiety and fear of political persecution. Historically, anti-Semitism has sown division within the poor and working-classes, preventing the emergence of multi-class, multi-racial and multi-ethnic mass movements.

Fear of political persecution, combined with historical trauma and fear of anti-Semitic violence played out through McCarthyism in the “Second Red Scare” of the late 1940s–1950s, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, a Republican from Wisconsin whose name is now synonymous with unfounded attacks on individuals or institutions for political gain. On the heels of the Holocaust and the ascension of the Soviet Union, American politicians like McCarthy sought to root out communists and leftist movement activists throughout the country’s institutions – including schools and universities, Hollywood, and labor unions. The witch hunt traded on previously discussed stereotypes about Jews as foreign, dangerous, and trouble-makers (though it targeted Jews and non-Jews alike). Hundreds of people, many of them Jews, lost their livelihoods as they were fired and “blacklisted” for even the suspicion of being communist. In that way, the Red Scare shredded the social fabric of the communist and radical movements by incentivizing people to betray their comrades, friends, and neighbors.

The parade of Jews who were dragged into congressional hearings and outed in newspapers as communists—culminating in the electric chair execution of the Rosenbergs—only a few years after the Holocaust, left many white Jews frozen with fear and willing to hide their past political activism; they quietly accepted their own assimilation into de-politicized white America as the price of their safety. By destroying the organizations that could facilitate those relationships, McCarthyism also broke ties between radical Jewish and Black organizers who might have been able to preserve alliances between Jewish and Black communities when they began to unravel in the 1960s and 1970s.

- JFREJ’s Understanding Anti-semitism

Is criticism of Israel anti-Semitic?

Criticisms of Israel and Zionism are not inherently or inevitably anti-Jewish. All states, movements and ideologies should be scrutinized, and all forms of injustice denounced. It is not antiJewish to denounce oppressive acts committed by Jews. On the contrary, insisting that a history of oppression exempts Jews—or any other group for that matter—from accountability undermines Jewish liberation and betrays our values.

....

For many Jews, the State of Israel has felt like the only thing standing between them and another Holocaust. This fear, rooted in very recent historical trauma, is why grounded and valid protests against Israeli government policy or Zionism are sometimes heard by Jews as threats to the safety of the Jewish people as a whole. Actual violence against Jews or other anti-Semitic acts in the U.S., Europe, the Middle East, and around the globe only compound these fears and further a tragic dynamic.

....

We cannot overlook any injustice when we see it, no matter where it is or who is causing it. As Jews, we are no less responsible for our role in perpetuating oppression anywhere in the world because of our history of persecution; in fact, that history should only further fuel our commitment to justice. But our movements must also continue to cultivate clarity about the role that all oppressions—including anti-Semitism—play in maintaining the status quo. If we're committed to collective liberation, we can't compromise on who's included in that vision for the world. We need everyone, from New York to Palestine.

- JFREJ's Understanding Anti-Semitism