



## JREJ JEWS FOR RACIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

### **What's the deal with Jews?**

- Jews are a tiny percentage of the U.S. population: there are 5.3 million Jews — approximately 2.2% of the total population of the country. Among those five million U.S. Jews are people of every race, gender, and economic status. There are Jews in every state of the US, with the largest absolute populations in New York, California, and Florida and the most per capita in New York, New Jersey and Washington D.C.
- Jews are a racially and ethnically diverse community. Some Jewish ethnic groups include Eastern and Western European (Ashkenazi); Middle Eastern, North African, Central Asian, and Balkan (Mizrahi); African Ethiopian and Ugandan (African); and Spanish and Portuguese (Sephardi).
- Jews come from every part of the world, and look every kinda way.
- Though many people think that all Jews in the U.S. are white, somewhere between 11% and 20% of Jews in the United States are people of color. Like all other people of color, Jews of color are the targets of racism and white supremacy, as well as anti-Semitism.
- Jews have been in the US since the colonial period, though much of what we associate with Jewish life and culture in the United States arrived with the large wave of Ashkenazi Jews immigrating from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1921.

### **Clarity, Not Stereotypes: Debunking Myths About Jewish Wealth**

#### **There is great class diversity among Jews.**

- Of the 13.1 million people in the world who are millionaires, 56.2% were Christians, while 6.5% were Muslims, 3.9% were Hindu and 1.7% were Jewish. Jews make up 11.6% of the world's billionaires — higher than Jews' percentile in the world's population but a small fraction of the total. Contrary to conspiracy theories about Jews — and conspiracy theories in general — no single group controls the planet's wealth.
- The vast majority of high income people in the U.S. are non-Jews. It is also true that in the U.S. Jews are disproportionately better paid than most other religious and ethnic groups: Some 25% of Jews in the US report household incomes over \$150,000, compared to 8% of the general population. However, Jewish adults make up a very small percentage of the U.S. population, only 5.3 million out of 318 million (2.2%).
- 45% of all children in Jewish households in New York now live below or near the poverty line and the Jewish poverty rate is 26.4% — only slightly lower than the general population (30.8%). The number of poor Jews increased by 22% between 1991 and 2011.
- Despite widespread Jewish poverty, the experiences of poor and working-class Jewish communities are erased by false characterizations of Jews as uniformly wealthy.

**In short, our community is extremely diverse. It includes rich Jews and poor Jews, white Jews and Jewish people of color. It is important to be clear that there are many Jews with race and class privilege.**



## JEWIS FOR RACIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

### **For non-Jews: Tips for Countering Anti-Semitism...**

#### **In movement spaces**

- Educate yourself: Learn at least a little about Jews, and become “anti-Semitism literate.”
- A little solidarity goes a long way: Reach out to your local Jewish communities with support during threats or attacks on Jewish communal spaces.
- If you feel ready, forge real relationships. Get yourself to a progressive seder. You’ll have fun, promise.
- Don’t make assumptions or generalize about Jews — that POC next to you might be Jewish: Acknowledge the race and class diversity of the Jewish community, and ways in which Black and Arab Jews get particularly targeted, as well as the ways that poor and working class Jews are rendered invisible.
- Support the leadership of Jewish people of color
- If you want to be inclusive, be inclusive: if you’d like Jews to be able to attend, take account of the Jewish calendar and Jewish holidays when planning meetings
- Notice the operation of Christian dominance in U.S. society, and how it shows up in the political and social landscape, and in your organizational practice, culture, and policies. You don’t have to stop loving Christian culture, just be thoughtful about how and where it shows up.

#### **In your organizing and campaigns:**

- Remember that we fight institutions not groups of people; if folks around you are focusing on any group — including Jews — rather than transforming oppressive systems, something’s probably wrong.
- If your campaign engages with Jews or Jewish groups, make accurate assessments of Jewish power. What do these folks actually have control over, and what don’t they? Is there a larger system or institution setting both of you up to be in conflict?
- Especially if you need to target or call-out a Jewish policymaker or institution, look to progressive Jewish organizations and individuals as valuable allies. (But do it anyway, because we’re great!)
- If your politics extend to Israel/Palestine, take care to distinguish legitimate anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism.



## For Jews: Showing-up in anti-racist movements

- **Support the leadership of Jewish people of color**

- **Central but not centered.** When confronted with real or perceived anti-Semitism, white Jews sometimes panic, make demands for attention, care, time, etc. or voice their opinions in a media landscape that they may have easier access to because of race and class privilege. White Jews need to make careful, thoughtful choices about how they show up, with clarity about how much “oxygen they can suck out of the room” when they make accusations of anti-Semitism in public, or demand to be included in campaigns, events or movements that they may not have been contributing to until very recently. White Jews have vital contributions to make to anti-racist movements but need to find “right-sized” roles that center the voices of people of color (including Jews of color), Muslims, immigrants and others directly targeted by state violence.

- **Jews: organize your communities and institutions** to actively support grassroots, POC-led community organizing for justice. Without litmus tests. The only way we can resist anti-Semitism, white nationalism and white supremacy is to actively participate in the campaigns for racial justice and police accountability being waged all across the country by local organizations, especially those led by people of color. You may not agree with every position held by every leader or organization. But we have to keep our eyes on the prize, and stay in relationship with each other so that we can agitate and change each other, with love. We can win, but only by creating movements too powerful to be ignored. In this struggle there is no neutral ground — if the Jewish community isn't part of the solution, then it is part of the problem.

— by *Dania Rajendra, Audrey Sasson & Leo Ferguson*

## Suggested Reading List:

*Understanding Anti-Semitism*, by Jews For Racial & Economic Justice (Available in November, 2017)

*The History of White People*, by Nell Painter

*Taboo Memories*, by Ella Shohat

*Living in the Shadow of the Cross: Understanding and Resisting the Power and Privilege of Christian Hegemony*, by Paul Kivel

*The Past Didn't Go Anywhere (zine)* by April Rosenblum

*The Color of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

*Constantine's Sword: The Church and Jews, a History* by James Carroll