

White Jewish Solidarity in the Time of #BlackLivesMatter Toward Responsible Allyship

(We) American White Ashkenazi Jews*...

- *Have not always been White in this country*, and at times were **excluded from benefits** allocated to White people and have been **terrorized** and **criminalized** for our Jewishness; at the same time, we have never been marked as Black and have never suffered the targeted, systemic violence and undervaluing of life and humanity directed at Black people in this country.
- *Have benefited from Whiteness in countless, material ways*: Whiteness has given us **access to better educations, better paying jobs, safer neighborhoods, safety from police, unearned trust and respect, and countless other privileges...**
- *Have been harmed by Whiteness in subtle, significant ways*: We have been told (implicitly and explicitly) that we must leave our **shapely noses, unruly hair, loud jokes, foreignness, radical politics, Yiddish language, kosher practices**, etc. at the door in order to obtain self-determination and material security via Whiteness. This is a **Faustian bargain**. It's not that there's one, single right type of hair, politics, language, or religious practices one needs to be fully Jewish—rather, it's that we have a right to develop our complex and contradictory Jewish identities on our own terms, without the warping pressures of **White supremacy** and **Christian hegemony**.
- *Get to hold the complexity* that we have **both been harmed by and have benefited from Whiteness**.
- *Are morally obligated, in examining our own current and historical situations, to set it in the context of systemic violence toward Black people in this country, stretching from slave days to Jim Crow to the continuing reality of mass incarceration, mass poverty, and state-sanctioned extrajudicial murder of Black people in the present day.*
- *Can understand why Black people*—subjected to being systemically locked up, starved, and gunned down in the streets—may not have room at this time to hear our pain from how we've been harmed by Whiteness.
- *Must answer the clear call put out by Black leadership* for White people to show up in **allyship roles** to support #blacklivesmatter movement.
- *Must show up for our Black and Brown Jewish community members in their struggle for liberation in our larger society and within our Jewish communities.*
- *Can enter into solidarity with Black people's movement* by a) showing up in an **allyship role** in which we center the struggle for Black liberation, **taking a step back in Black and Brown spaces** from expressing our own pains from White supremacy; b) acknowledging to ourselves that we also enter into solidarity work for our own healing from the harms and losses done to us by Whiteness; and c) and **building spaces within our own communities** to work on that healing.
- *Can—perhaps—by showing up with integrity, humility, and efficacy as allies to Black people's movement*, over the years and lifetimes of that work, build trust and relationships with Black people and other people of color, in which we can in turn express our own pain and harms from Whiteness and invite our comrades to show up in solidarity for our struggle for full self-determination as well. **In the words of Alicia Garza**, “When Black people get free, everybody gets free...We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation, and we know that our destinies are intertwined.”

*(Note that “American White Ashkenazi Jews” is used by White people who descend from Ashkenazi Jews as well as by people who have converted to Judaism through the Ashkenazi tradition.)

To move forward our intertwined struggles for liberation...

- We need to educate ourselves, support Black- and Brown-led organizations with our feet and our dollars, and organize with other Jews and other White people to mobilize ourselves and our communities into anti-racist action.

Here are some practical steps to make that happen:

How to Ally: Resources and Tips

- “Take ownership over your own education...Respect Black and Brown spaces...Mobilize your people.”– “[How to be a White Ally](#),” [Black Millennials](#)
- Allyship is a practice, not some halo’d state of purity in which we get to be one of the “good ones” who are untainted by racism. It is fundamentally about taking action to fight racism (and other systems of domination like patriarchy), not about our attitude or feelings about these issues. Effective allyship in action looks like listening, acting in organizations under the leadership of directly impacted people, mobilizing those with whom we share an identity, taking accountability when we make mistakes, and not hogging the spotlight. — “[So You Call Yourself an Ally: 10 Things All ‘Allies’ Need to Know](#),” [Jamie Utt](#)
- Jews of color “[often feel alienated within mainstream American Jewish institutions](#).” Listen to the [diverse voices of Jews of color](#) and respond to [what they are asking of us](#).
- Read everything you can by awesome self-loving, Jewish anti-racist thinkers such as Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (check out her “[Jews in the U.S.: The Rising Costs of Whiteness](#)”) and Paul Kivel (check out this [article on allyship](#) and his recent [Christian Hegemony Project](#)).
- And always a necessary reminder for me as I do this work: “Not being an asshole doesn’t make you a miracle. It doesn’t even make you a good person – just a decent one. It makes you a person who is horrified by the idea that too much of your success, safety, and opportunity in the world have been given you due to systemic injustice, racism, classism, sexism, white skin privilege, ability, and the rest, and who is creeped out by the idea because maybe you’ve experienced just enough bullshit to know exactly how fucked up the world is.” — “[How \(Not\) To Be An Ally](#),” [Helen Boyd](#) (adapted from and in response to [Black Girl Dangerous](#))

Where to Ally: Organizations

Anti-racist allyship is fundamentally about taking effective, organized action to fight racism. So, where do we turn to do that? I’ve listed some orgs. below that a) explicitly center the liberation of Black and Brown people and b) to which White people are welcome to contribute their time or money—please feel free to add in the comments section any other orgs. that match those criteria.

- *Volunteer our time at a person of color-led organization with a model for white allyship, such as [Right to the City](#) (find a chapter near you) or [Causa Justa::Just Cause](#) (that’s where I volunteer, in the San Francisco Bay Area).*
- *Take action in a White anti-racist organization such as [SURJ](#) or [White Noise Collective](#)*
- *Take action in a Jewish anti-racist organization such as [JFREJ](#) (NYC), [Detroit Jews For Justice](#), [JCUA](#) (Chicago), or [JOIN](#); and whatever you may make of [JVP](#)’s Palestine solidarity politics, the organization was indisputably [the nationwide leader in turning out Jews](#) for last [Chanukah’s #BlackLivesMatter actions](#).*
- *Tzedakah, tzedakah we shall give, to any of the organizations above or to person of color-led, feminist orgs. like the [Grassroots Global Justice Alliance](#) or the [National Domestic Workers’ Alliance](#). If you’re affluent, consider connecting with other affluent justice-seekers at [Resource Generation](#).*