

**Title:**

*Jews, Racism, and the Implications for Today's Rise in Antisemitism*

**Facilitators' Notes:**

The intent of this session is to generate discussion and understanding about the relationship between antisemitism and racism. As you move through the materials, you may find that participants want to talk about the current political situation in Israel-Palestine. Whereas this topic is obviously important, it is not the intent of this session. It is critical to maintain focus on the intent of the materials. As facilitators, you may want to establish this expectation right away.

Participants are being asked to consider antisemitism in the context of American racism and the pervasive power of white supremacy that continues to exist in our country. There will be no clear conclusions, and in fact, more questions are likely to arise than are answered. This is a good place to ask people to embrace the complexity of the issues they are examining, without expecting clear resolution.

Many are uncertain how to answer the questions of whether Jews are a race, and whether Judaism is an ethnicity, a religion, a culture, an idea. Are Jews religious or secular? Can they identify as being Jewish and not practice the rituals of the religion itself? Many such questions are frequently asked when trying to define and understand Jewish identity and Judaism.

In this session, we must remember not to generalize ideas learned and discussed to *all Jews*. The article from [myjewishlearning.org](http://myjewishlearning.org) (*Are Jews a Race?*) provides a complex but clear way of approaching the issue of how to think about Jews as a racial demographic, a religion, an ethnicity and so forth. The *Berkeley Center for Jewish Studies* video provides additional explanation for this.

*The Berkeley Center for Jewish Studies* is particularly valuable in discussing how to identify antisemitic comments, as is the information provided in the excerpt of the *Report from Jews for Racial and Economic Justice*. While certainly not required, consider reading as much of the whole report as may appeal. Move carefully through discussions of how participants are perceiving these teachings. This information can be challenging.

You will find two readings provided by *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Washington D.C.) that focus on the discrete history of antisemitism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and on the Eugenics Movement that experienced both scientific and societal popularity at the same time. These provide necessary historical background for understanding the enduring scourge of hate crimes against Jews that continue to plague United States.

Adele Reinhartz' Introduction to *The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Relations* invites participants to engage in the historical context of antisemitic tropes - Jews as persecutors of Jesus, Jews and Satan, and the on-going charge of deicide. After discussing various parts of the Introduction, consider asking participants to find such images in our Christian scriptures.

One final reading encourages participants to examine their identity as Christians in the larger cultural and social environment. Lewis Schlosser's article on *Christian Privilege* directly links the idea of privilege with racial issues and oppression of others in nondominant groups by paralleling the structure of white privilege and race created by Peggy McIntosh in the late 1990's. His premise that Christians are innately privileged in our country is illustrated in the list of Christian privileges he has created.

Discussion of the Reinhartz and Schlosser pieces hopefully will ground participants in the final challenge of this session – to confront how Jews were depicted in the Scriptures, especially in the accounts of his crucifixion and death.

Many Episcopalians have had difficulty with the language found in the Gospels – especially the Gospel of John, some of which is traditionally read during Good Friday of Holy Week. Texts that challenge us to understand the people in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus are varied, but none seems to settle the matter of how to prevent the implication of who killed Jesus. Begin by reading the excerpt from the Gospel of John and allow participants to respond to how they spiritually experience the language within the passage. Biases are created from continuous exposure to and use of different texts and translations and these biases have had various implications for real world hatred. In discussing this with participants, encourage them to think deeply and spiritually and intellectually about the impact of individual words and phrases in the shared passage from the Gospel of John.

As with all the *Sacred Ground* sessions, there is no easy resolution for the feelings that participants might be left with. Asking participants to name this *dis-ease* may be a good closing discussion. This session is intended to focus specifically on the power dynamic of whiteness and privilege, including Christian privilege, and the racial, cultural, and ethnic abuses perpetrated against Jews, including by Christians, for centuries. It demands that we look directly at this specific aspect of antisemitism and racism and attempt to open our hearts and minds to another reckoning of how our history reflects the oppression of other non-dominant groups. Can we accept the reality that such hatred is structural, and meet the challenges of deconstructing it in today's current expressions of hate?

**Introduction to the session:**

You have been walking through a chronological history of the effects of racism on multiple groups of people who comprise the rich racial and religious texture of the United States. This session focuses on the connections between racism - in particular anti-Blackness - and antisemitism, which are both oppressive realities that exploit the “othering” of two groups of people who have been marginalized for hundreds of years in this country.

The current rise in antisemitic acts in the United States has been starkly dramatic. To understand the historical and contemporary intersection of racism and antisemitism, how Jews were marginalized and racialized, and to look at the ways that Christianity has perpetuated antisemitism are necessary learnings to help explain the current state of hate crimes against Jews.

*Sacred Ground* is a film- and reading- based dialogue series on race, grounded in faith. After this session, how might we begin to forge social justice relationships to confront racial injustices in our yearning to create the idea of the *beloved community* so valued among Blacks, Jews, and Christians?

**Watch:**

- USHMM – *What is Antisemitism?*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdvTtKCCZGo>
- Berkeley Center for Jewish Studies – *Antisemitism in Our Midst: Past and Present* (copy the film link and post in your favorite browser)  
<https://jewishstudies.berkeley.edu/antisemitism-education/antisemitism-training-film>

**Read:**

- T’ruah – *A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism*  
[2024 T’ruah - A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism](#)
- myjewishlearning.org – *Are Jews a Race?*  
[https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/are-jews-a-race/?utm\\_source=mjl\\_maropost&utm\\_campaign=MJL&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/are-jews-a-race/?utm_source=mjl_maropost&utm_campaign=MJL&utm_medium=email)
- “Antisemitism in History: Racial Antisemitism, 1875-1945 – from *Holocaust Encyclopedia* (USHMM)  
[USHMM Antisemitism in History](#)

- “Racial Science and Law in Nazi Germany and the United States – “Eugenics” (USHMM)  
[Eugenics](#)

- Jews for Racial and Economic Justice – *Understanding Antisemitism*  
[Full Report from Jews for Racial and Economic Justice](#)  
Read pages 8-11 (starting with “TIP – Check Your Assumptions” and stopping at “Part II”).

*While certainly not required, consider reading as much of the whole report as you can.*

- Biblical citation from the Gospel of John 19: 1-27 ---
  - <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+19&version=NIV>  
John 19: 1-27
- From the Introduction (written by Adele Reinhartz) to *The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Relations* – edited by Adele Reinhartz  
[Click here for Adele Reinhartz - Introduction](#)
- “Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo” by Lewis Z. Schlosser  
[Click here for Christian Privilege by Lewis Z. Schlosser](#)