

**From:** Mike Stein  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021 11:19 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Cc:** mike stein  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Jews and White Privilege

To Whom it May Concern:

I really appreciate that our students in California are learning about Jews as a religious and ethnic group. Much of the information that the students are receiving is accurate but there are several points that jump out at me:

1. I am a Jewish man of deep faith and identity, a warrior as, you describe in the curriculum, who feels an obligation to stand up for those without a voice because that is part of my identity. I have partnered our synagogue with a church in Compton and we have had an amazing, extensive relationship--dialoguing, praying and marching with each other. In one of our forums a young woman from Compton noted that the best lawyers were Jewish and in her music career she wanted a Jewish lawyer. She thought that "white privilege" experienced by Jews gave them the opportunities that blacks like herself did not have. What she did not understand is that Jews until recently were not allowed to join "white, Christian" law firms---they had to form their own. This IS NOT white privilege. The same with doctors--why are so many hospitals have Jewish names like Sinai? Because Jewish Doctors were not allowed to be part of the primarily Christian hospital systems. This blew her mind and she understood just a little bit better the history of Jews in America. I did not see this historical element of Jewish life mentioned in your curriculum. Rather it only identifies the Holocaust as the major wrong done to the Jewish people. It is only part of a long history of oppression--NOT privilege. Jews were not able to attend Ivy league schools -- my son who went to Yale could not have gone in another time. But he got to go---maybe because his mother, my wife is Black (and Jewish)--I don't think so, because they took accepted him in the 11th grade from a Black school in DC. Think of the irony if you give credence to the rhetoric of this curriculum.
2. Jews, yes, think that they are considered white in American society. We are not. My African American wife likes to go around to our Jewish brethren and say to them; "You think you're white?. What she is saying is that it doesn't take much for society to turn against the Jews. It is not only white supremacists, it is many of the people that pass us by in the street. I was walking to my synagogue on the High Holy Days and some kids in a pickup truck screamed Heil Hitler and gave me the Nazi salute. I surely did not get a warm, fuzzy feeling of white privilege. Let's replace the rhetoric with something like: yes, they were able to get ahead because some appear to be white, but when the axe falls, they will be the first to be discriminated against.
3. I work in the multifaith community and my Muslim friends say to me: "I am worried about Muslims in America---you have been here since the 1600's and you are still facing

hate crimes and all sorts of unfair stereotyping. How long will it take for us? Or will we ever be accepted?" Our synagogue had a swastika drawn on the building. Because of the work that I do with the mosques in the area, the Sheikh of the local congregation brought us flowers the very next morning that it was reported.

There is no need to use the words "white privilege" when referring to Jews in America. We were not even close to being accepted by American society or privileged for that matter, most of our existence on this soil. Dr King did not think we were privileged, we stood with him for racial justice and continue to do the same. And we are taught by our sages that if we are fortunate to have, then we are obligated to give--and even if we don't have the obligation is the same.

Using phrases like white privilege gives rise to stereotypes that I know that you do not want to provide to the young minds of California. We have struggled greatly here, and the stereotypical trope of "Jews own everything--the media, the banks..... " (the list goes on ) is fed by the idea that Jews are privileged.

I urge you to find another way to approach subject and would be glad to help in any way that I can.

שלום וברכה

Peace and blessing,

Hazzan Mike Stein

Temple Aliyah

[address redacted]

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