

From: OBSATZ_SHARYN

Sent: Wednesday, January 20, 2021 10:39 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] A nuanced and more accurate way to look at and discuss Jewish ancestry in CA Ethnic Studies classes

Hi,

In light of the synagogue shooting in Southern California, the racist graffiti tagged on an LA synagogue this week, the Capital insurrectionists wearing shirts with "Camp Auschwitz" and "6MWE: Six Million Wasn't Enough," I wanted to share some of the wording I use in my Media, Gender, Race and Class course at Santa Monica College.

As a Jewish professor, I feel it is important to be as clear as possible about the diversity of Jewish experiences and also how anti-Semitism operates outside of skin-color categories.

It could be useful to tell our story more fully.

I've copied and pasted it below.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sharyn Obsatz
Journalism and Media Studies Professor
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- Being Jewish is a religion, ethnicity and ancestry.
- But Jewish people come from many diverse backgrounds.
- My own ancestors are Eastern European Jews. My grandfather came to the U.S. from Poland in 1920.
- Back then, Jews were not categorized as white and faced a lot of discrimination.
- After school, bullies often beat up my father for being Jewish.
 - By my generation, many people thought of Eastern European Jewish people as white. People who aren't Jewish often cannot tell I'm Jewish by looking at me. Thus I benefit from white privilege and have always been treated well by police, for example.
 - I dated a Jewish man whose family was from Yemen. His skin was darker, and he had experienced prejudice from many people, including police.
 - Often when media scholars talk about Jewish people, they focus only on Eastern European Jews, ignoring Persian, Sephardi, Latinx, North African and Middle-Eastern Jews, who often are treated as non-white.

- Separate from skin color, Jews also face the religious prejudice called anti-Semitism. Hate crimes against Jews have risen in the U.S., including deadly synagogue shootings.
- The narrative of Jews as assimilating into whiteness in the U.S. is more complex than it shows in most textbooks.

Religious prejudice -- Anti-Semitism statistics:

A lot of focus on the perceived whiteness of Jews ignores the persistence of anti-Semitism, which is a problem world-wide and has resulted in hate crimes and synagogue shootings in the United States and Europe.

Here's the first three paragraphs of a report from the Anti-Defamation League:

Antisemitic Incidents Hit All- Time High in 2019

ADL annual report found more than 2,100 acts of antisemitic hate; 56 percent increase in assaults, five fatalities

New York, May 12, 2020 ... The American Jewish community experienced the highest level of antisemitic incidents last year since tracking began in 1979, with more than 2,100 acts of assault, vandalism and harassment reported across the United States, according to new data from ADL (the Anti-Defamation League). The record number of incidents came as the Jewish community grappled with vicious and

lethal antisemitic attacks against communities in Poway, Jersey City and Monsey, and a spree of violent assaults in Brooklyn.

The 2019 ADL [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents \(Links to an external site.\)](#), issued today, found that the total number of antisemitic incidents in 2019 increased 12 percent over the previous year, with a disturbing 56 percent increase in assaults. The audit found there were, on average, as many as six antisemitic incidents in the U.S. for each day in the calendar year – the highest level of antisemitic activity ever recorded by ADL.

The year included five fatalities directly linked to antisemitic violence and another 91 individuals targeted in physical assaults. Incidents were reported in every one of the 48 contiguous United States and Washington, D.C. More than half of the assaults nationwide took place in the five boroughs of New York City, including 25 in Brooklyn alone.

You can read more here: <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/antisemitic-incidents-hit-all-time-high-in-2019>

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar: Where Is the Outrage Over Anti-Semitism in Sports and Hollywood?

The Hollywood Reporter columnist calls out the hateful outbursts against Jews by Ice Cube, DeSean Jackson and others and explains how the muted response "perpetuates racism" and contributes to an overall "Apatholypse."

4:00 PM PDT 7/14/2020 by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

Recent incidents of anti-Semitic tweets and posts from sports and entertainment celebrities are a very troubling omen for the future of the Black Lives Matter movement, but so too is the shocking lack of massive indignation. Given the New Woke-fulness in Hollywood and the sports world, we expected more passionate public outrage. What we got was a shrug of meh-rage.

When reading the dark squishy entrails of popular culture, meh-rage in the face of sustained prejudice is an indisputable sign of the coming Apatholypse: apathy to all forms of social justice. After all, if it's OK to discriminate against one group of people by hauling out cultural stereotypes without much pushback, it must be OK to do the same to others. Illogic begets illogic.

Ice Cube's June 10 daylong series of tweets, which involved some creepy symbols and images, in general implied that Jews were

responsible for the oppression of blacks. NFL player DeSean Jackson tweeted out several anti-Semitic messages, including a quote he incorrectly thought was from Hitler (not your go-to guy for why-can't-we-all-get-along quotes) stating that Jews had a plan to “extort America” and achieve “world domination.” Isn't that SPECTRE's job in James Bond movies?

These statements would be laughed at by anyone with a middle-school grasp of reason, but then former NBA player Stephen Jackson, a self-proclaimed activist, undid whatever progress his previous advocacy may have achieved by agreeing with DeSean Jackson on social media. Then he went on to talk about the Rothschilds owning all the banks and his support for the notorious homophobe and anti-Semite Louis Farrakhan. That is the kind of dehumanizing characterization of a people that causes the police abuses that killed his friend, George Floyd.

June continued to bust out all over with anti-Semitism when performer Chelsea Handler, herself Jewish, posted videos of Farrakhan to her 3.9 million followers. That means almost 4 million people received a subliminal message that even some Jews think being anti-Jewish is justified.

That same month, President Donald Trump's reelection campaign also has been criticized for exploiting anti-Jewish biases, even though Trump's son-in-law and campaign honcho Jared Kushner is Jewish and his daughter Ivanka converted to Judaism before they married. Playing on the same Rothschild's trope, they issued a letter accusing three billionaires of Jewish descent of using their fortunes to “rig the November election.” This is the kind of “very fine people on both sides” Trump has employed throughout his political career — pandering to hate groups that has emboldened racists who feel like they've gotten the presidential OK to attack people they don't like.

These famous, outspoken people share the same scapegoat logic as all oppressive groups from Nazis to the KKK: all our troubles are because of bad-apple groups that worship wrong, have the wrong complexion, come from the wrong country, are the wrong gender or love the wrong gender. It's so disheartening to see people from groups that have been violently marginalized do the same thing to others without realizing that perpetuating this kind of bad logic is what perpetuates racism.

Yes, some of the above have apologized — DeSean Jackson, Stephen Jackson, Chelsea Handler — while others continue to defiantly marinate in their own prejudice. Their arrogant and irrational response to accusations of anti-Semitism, rather than dissuade us, actually confirmed people's worst opinions. Ice Cube's response was remorseless: “What if I was just pro-Black? This is the truth brother. I didn't lie on anyone. I didn't say I was anti anybody. DONT BELIEVE

THE HYPE. I've been telling my truth." His "truth" was clearly anti-Semitic but, like Trump, he believes his truth exists outside facts. As writer Roxane Gay summed it up: "It is impossible to take you seriously with regards to social justice or anything when you post anti-Semitic imagery. What the fuck are you doing?"

Even the apologies floundered, more attempts at spin than true contrition. In a CNN interview, Stephen Jackson was angry and belligerent at being called out: "I stated I could have changed my words. There's nothing that I said that I support any of that. There's nothing I said that I hate anybody. I apologize for my words and I could have switched up. That's the end of it. I love everybody." While it's possible the words were wrong, celebrities have a responsibility to get the words right. It's not enough to have good intentions, because it's the actual deeds — and words — which have the real impact. In this case destructive impact. In 2013, there were 751 reported hate crimes against Jews, but by 2019 the number had nearly tripled to 2,107. That same year, a gunman in San Diego entered a synagogue and murdered one person while wounding three.

One of the most powerful songs in the struggle against racism is Billie Holiday's melancholic "Strange Fruit," which was first recorded in 1939. The song met strong resistance from radio stations afraid of its graphic lyrics about lynching:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Despite those who wanted to suppress the song, it went on to sell a million copies that year and became Holiday's best-selling record ever. The song was written by a white, Jewish high school teacher, Abel Meeropol, who performed it with his wife around New York before it was given to Holiday.

The lesson never changes, so why is it so hard for some people to learn: No one is free until everyone is free. As Martin Luther King Jr. explained: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality." So, let's act like it. If we're going to be outraged by injustice, let's be outraged by injustice against anyone.

THR columnist Kareem Abdul Jabbar is an NBA Hall of Famer and the author of Mycroft and Sherlock: The Empty Birdcage and other books.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/kareem-abdul-jabbar-is-outrage-anti-semitism-sports-hollywood-1303210>