

1st Question: Why is Racism A Jewish Issue?

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Source: Jews United for Justice

American Jews come in all different skin colors, socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and ways of practicing Judaism and being Jewish. Regardless of color or country, Jews have been oppressed and discriminated against throughout history. That history of oppression and exclusion, some of it very recent, is embedded in our culture and our hearts. But our story is also complicated, a winding tale of oppression and freedom, of struggle and triumph. How we respond to that story is critical. Rather than isolating ourselves out of continued fear, we must use our history to cultivate empathy and open our hearts to stand in solidarity with people who are oppressed and discriminated against in our society today.

Discrimination is also an issue within the Jewish community. Although Jews of color make up 10-20% of American Jews and an even higher proportion of Jews worldwide, European-descended Jews dominate the political, cultural, and economic landscape of Jewry. For white-skinned Jews in America, our whiteness presents a paradox. We have experienced anti-Semitism, a form of oppression that is different from but entwined with racism. We know the isolation and alienation of living in a Christian-dominated culture that demands that we assimilate to fit in, and we are only a generation removed from restricted neighborhoods and Jewish quotas at universities and professional firms. But our experience of anti-Jewish oppression has not always led us to be fierce and loving allies to our Jewish brothers and sisters of color. Too often, Jews of color are rendered either invisible or "other" in Jewish communities, questioned, scrutinized, and asked to prove their Jewishness, their knowledge, or their right to be present.

We can, and must, do better.