ZIONESS

Zionesses for Racial Justice:
AN ACTIVIST'S GUIDE

Understanding and Confronting Implicit Bias and Privilege

Showing Up as Allies and Accomplices

We May Experience Antisemitism. We Will Address it. We Must Not Walk Away.

Addressing Anitsemitic Tropes in Your Activism

@ZIONESSMOVEMENT

Zionesses for Racial Justice: AN ACTIVIST'S GUIDE

UNDERSTANDING AND CONFRONTING IMPLICIT BIAS AND PRIVILEGE

Many are realizing for the first time that the United States is built upon a foundation of white supremacy and systemic racism. While we recognize and affirm the frustration of our Black siblings and neighbors that this awakening is long overdue, there is a reckoning happening—and a real opportunity for Zionesses to use our varying levels of privilege to pursue sustainable change.

This moment has called for us to reflect, listen, and ask how we can show up as the best and most effective allies and accomplices. There is an endless amount of listening left to do, but we have already heard overwhelmingly from our Black partners and allies: **we must start by understanding and confronting the implicit biases within all of us, as citizens of the United States and participants (even if unintentionally) in the unjust systems and institutions that hold up our country—and hold down BIPOC individuals (Black, Indigenous and People of Color).**

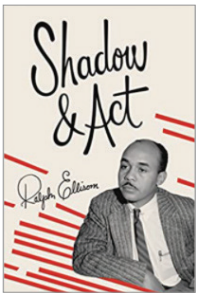
We know from our own work how critically important it is to let members of historically targeted communities define their own pain, express their own challenges, and ask for whatever form of solidarity makes them feel most seen and supported. This is the solidarity that we are unequivocally committed to providing. That means that we must take the time to listen and learn.

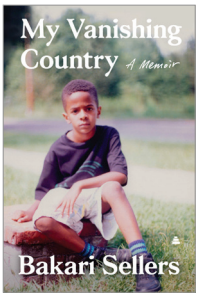
DO THE WORK WITH ZIONESS

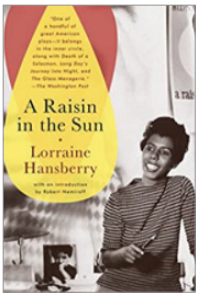
Watch our webinar, Understanding Implicit Bias with Leslie Short of The Cavu Group (a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion firm).

Then sign up for a conversation with fellow Zioness activists in your community on anti-racism.

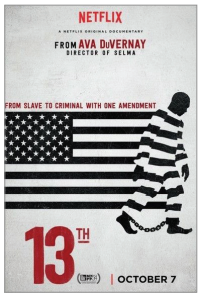
READ

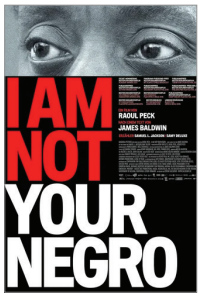


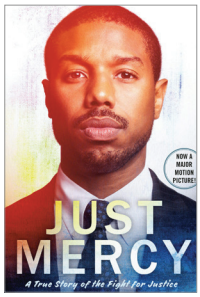




WATCH







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SHOWING UP AS ALLIES AND ACCOMPLICES

Black lives matter. As Jews, our primary mandate is *pikuach nefesh*, our commitment to protecting and preserving human life. We live in a country and a world where some lives are valued less than others, where Black people are held down by systemic oppression through institutions and social realities that form the foundation of our everyday lives. This reality is intolerable, and Zioness declares, today and every day, not only that Black lives matter, but that Black lives are beautiful, invaluable, precious. Our work to dismantle white supremacy and its systems of oppression will not end until we live in a world that fully respects and values the humanity of BIPOC Americans.

That is why Zionesses from coast to coast have been and will continue to participate, proudly and vocally, at marches and rallies in support of Black lives. That is why we will continue our work with coalition building and fighting for policy changes at the local, state and federal levels.

There are several critical things we must understand about allyship. First, being an ally is a title we earn by showing up and doing the work—not a title we assume. Second, being an ally requires actions, not just words—allyship is a verb, not an adjective. Third, our ultimate goal shouldn't be just allyship. Rather, we should seek to become accomplices in dismantling systems of oppression and white supremacy in America that threaten both the Black and Jewish communities.

WE MAY EXPERIENCE ANTISEMITISM. WE WILL ADDRESS IT. WE MUST NOT WALK AWAY.

We know that there is a possibility that we may experience some painful antisemitism in our activism. If we encounter it, we will address it. **Antisemitism divides and weakens our movements for justice, pushing committed activists out of the spaces that are effectively advocating for urgent change.**

When we engage in good faith to advance movements for justice and face propaganda slandering Israel and Zionism—the liberation movement of the Jewish people—this antisemitism is painful and crushing. We will be conscious of the fact that what we hear often stems from a lack of understanding. We will assume the best in people and be gentle when correcting the record, understanding that our lived experiences may be different. **And we will remember that the fight against anti-Black and anti-Jewish racism is a shared battle against white supremacy, and our success depends on the strength of our relationships with our allies. We will only defeat hate by fighting it together.**

Four years ago, the platform announced by the Movement for Black Lives endorsed a boycott of Israel and cynically referred to Israel with factual fallacies and deeply hurtful and divisive language. It was harmful for our relationships and tested our historic and enduring bonds with the Black community. We cannot pretend this didn't happen, and Zioness' founders experienced this pain firsthand. At Zioness, we know that showing up authentically as who we are, building relationships, and engaging in these discussions head-on is the key to changing hearts and minds.

However, Black lives matter, even if we disagree—because Black lives matter, no matter what.

ADDRESSING ANTISEMITIC TROPES IN YOUR ACTIVISM

TROPE

"Zionism is Racism"

Zionism is the liberation movement of the Jewish people—akin to Black nationalism and decolonization of Indigenous land for Native Americans. **Zionism is the answer to the Jewish people's historic and systematic oppression: it is emancipation for one of world's most enduring persecuted communities.** Zionism has nothing to do with any other people other than the Jews, and it is not racism; it is justice for the Jewish people after millenia of oppression. Zioness, an unabashedly progressive and unapologetically Zionist

Background:

The phrase "Zionism is racism" originated with a Soviet and Arab-sponsored 1975 United Nations resolution that was widely condemned by many Black American leaders at the time. The U.N. rescinded and apologized for the resolution in 1991. Many Leftists, socialists, and labor organizers, including Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph (who organized the March on Washington), condemned the resolution upon its passage. Randolph called Israel's founding, "a heroic and challenging struggle for human rights, justice, and freedom."

The actual definition of Zionism is the struggle for the Jewish people's right to self-determination in our historic homeland. Today, Zionism means continuing this liberation by supporting the safety and security of the Jewish people in a safe and secure Israel. **The suggestion that "Zionism is racism" is an attack on Zionists—a perverse claim that Jews are racist for supporting our own emancipation.**

Further Reading:

Speech to the UN General Assembly, by U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Response To Common Inaccuracy: Zionism is Racism (ADL)

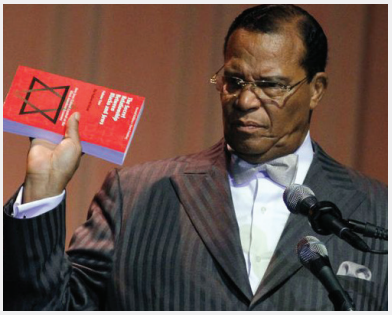
TROPE

"Jews were behind the Atlantic Slave Trade"

Jews did not start or control the Atlantic Slave Trade. This trope aims to divide Black and Jewish people—natural and powerful allies in our shared fight against white supremacy. And Jews did not make up a majority of slaveowners—not even close—nor could they possibly have, given that the American Jewish population only eclipsed 150,000 men, women and children in 1850. Sadly, there were Jews of means who did own slaves, like people of all backgrounds—Europeans, Africans, Arabs, and even Indigenous Americans—

Background:

This propaganda is primarily spread to demonize Jews and prevent Jews from engaging in anti-racist advocacy. It is commonly spread by Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, and David Duke, the



former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard—both designated hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center. **All mainstream scholars describe these claims as antisemitic.**

Jews were involved in American and the broader Atlantic Slave Trade to a comparatively insignificant degree, which does not absolve us of guilt, but contextualizes the appalling fact that the slave trade was ubiquitous. As David Brion Davis wrote, "The participants in the Atlantic slave system included Arabs, Berbers, scores of African ethnic groups, Italians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, Jews, Germans, Swedes, French, English, Danes, white Americans, Native Americans, and even thousands of New World blacks who had been emancipated or were descended from freed slaves but who then became slaveholding farmers or planters themselves."

Further Reading:

Is Jewish Control Over the Slave Trade a Nation of Islam Lie or Scholarly Truth? (Tablet)

The Slave Trade and the Jews (NY Review of Books)

TROPE

"Israel trains American law enforcement to be racist / 'Deadly Exchange'"

Racism and police brutality in America are systemic and institutionalized. They have been a shameful yet intentional part of our institutions since they were built, 400 years ago. Israel has been a state for 72 years, and joint police and military trainings have been happening for about 20 years. American racism is not caused or inflamed by joint U.S.-Israel security partnerships.

Background:

This is a form of blood libel, a common trope that seeks to blame Jews for death caused by other means. An extremist group with a dangerously misleading name, "Jewish Voice for Peace," has worked to spread this antisemitic claim in a series they call "Deadly Exchange" by alleging that exchanges of arms, security technologies and ideologies exacerbate violence and discrimination against communities of color in both countries.

American racism began when the first enslaved Africans were brought to Jamestown in 1619. Police brutality and white supremacy were endemic in America before, during, and after the Civil War (1860s) and Civil Rights Movement (1950s/60s). Theodor Herzl founded political Zionism when he published Der Judenstaat in 1896. Israel formally became a state in 1948—and has unfortunately been forced to become a world leader in anti-terrorism (because of thousands of attacks on innocent civilians since its founding) and national security policy (because of regular attacks by state and non-state actors on all sides of it). American and Israeli police started joint security training in the early 2000s. **The attempt to place blame on Israel (or Zionists—Jews who support our own liberation) for the murder of Black people in America is a hideous, defamatory accusation that reeks of anti-Jewish racism.**

Further Reading:

JVP's Anti-Semitic Obsession With Jewish Power (ADL)

Jews Drive U.S. Police Brutality Against People of Color? JVP Crosses Over Into anti-Semitism (Haaretz)

TROPE

"Israel treats Palestinians the same way America treats Black people"

The relationship between Israelis and Palestinians is not the same as the relationship between white America and Black America. Black people in America are fighting for equality in a country that promises that to all its citizens—a promise that has never been realized, and which will never be realized without the dismantling and rebuilding of our systems and institutions, which rest upon a foundation of white supremacy. **The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is about two distinct forms of nationalism—Jewish nationalism and Palestinian nationalism—that can (and we believe must) coexist, but not in the same state.** This is why most Israelis, and the vast majority of Jews across the diaspora (including in Zioness), support two states for two peoples, living side by side in peace, in which both states can realize the full rights and dreams of their peoples.

Background:

Upon Israel's founding and recognition by the international community in 1947, the Jews fighting for Israeli independence agreed to a U.N. Partition Plan, which would give sovereignty to both the Jews and the Arabs (both of whom were called Palestinians) living in the territory at the time. The Arab Palestinians did not accept statehood, and there have been a series of wars and military escalations waged against Israel since, which have resulted in death and destruction on both sides. However, Israel has never enslaved Palestinians, who are represented by two different Palestinian governments, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. **Israel faces real, existential internal and external threats, which have been internalized throughout Israeli society, including in law enforcement.** Sometimes those fears lead to mistakes, injustices and terribly distressing outcomes. But Israel does not have a 400 year history of systemic oppression, nor does it have systems that were built expressly to oppress Arabs. **Israel was recognized and built as a Jewish state—its foundation had one goal: to protect the Jewish people, a persecuted minority that has endured thousands of years of systemic and genocidal oppression.**

Further Reading:

Don't Confuse the Struggle of African Americans With That of the Palestinians (Haaretz)

A Dose of Nuance: Israel's Arabs are not America's blacks (The Jerusalem Post)

TROPE

"Israel is a racist country"

Israel is an extraordinarily diverse, multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-faith and pluralistic country in a constant struggle to balance its founding commitments as a Jewish-majority state (for the Jewish people, not ruled by the Jewish religion) and a thriving democracy. Israel is not perfect—but the disproportionate focus on Israel's challenges, especially as compared to nations around the world committing regular human rights atrocities, is explicitly antisemitic.

Background:

All Jews are indigenous to the land of Israel, and were only living in Europe and the Middle East/ North Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries because of their repeated expulsion from their ancestral home. Today, only 30% of Israeli Jews descend from refugees from Europe who present as "white". Most Israelis are Jews of Color whose families fled persecution and returned to Israel from across the MENA region.

Like many multicultural countries, disparities exist among Israelis of different ethnic backgrounds; for example, approximately 150,000 Ethiopian Jewish citizens of Israel lack equal access to the same opportunities as many non-African Israelis, and Arab Israelis, who make up 20% of Israel's population, frequently encounter various forms of bigotry. Although Israelis and Jews across the diaspora dream of a perfectly egalitarian Israel, we are proud of the many activists and organizations fighting for a more just and inclusive Israeli society for all of the country's citizens and inhabitants. **Those who claim "Israel is a racist state" by highlighting human rights violations, have consistently demonstrated a hypocrisy and inconsistency that can only be described as antisemitic.** As Jews, we are left to wonder why the world's only Jewish state is singled out with unique intensity and consistency for its injustices, while countless explicitly Christian and Islamic nations engage in human rights violations unquestionably more egregious than Israel's.

Further Reading:

No, Israel isn't a country of privileged and powerful white Europeans (Los Angeles Times)

Diversity in Israel: Lessons for the United States (Brookings Institution)

TROPE

"Israel is an apartheid state"

Israel's citizens come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds—including 2 million Arab Israelis out of a country of 10 million people—and are all subject to the same system of laws. **While there is racism and intolerance in Israel, like there is in every country in the world, the conflation of these disparities with apartheid is disturbing and abhorrent to Black South Africans who lived under a system that made them legally subservient, in every aspect of their lives, to a white ruling minority.**

Background:

Israel is a Jewish-majority state, reestablished in the 20th century as a refuge for the long-persecuted Jewish people. Unlike in apartheid South Africa, where whites were a minority ruling class that dominated the Black majority, Jews make up the overwhelming majority of Israel's population. Yet, unlike Black people in apartheid South Africa, Arab Israelis (and all Israelis) live under the same system of laws, and while no country

can claim full equality of opportunity, all Israelis have access to the same government systems and institutions that drive daily life. Ethiopian Jews facing repression were brought to Israel in history-making humanitarian airlifts and are full citizens with equal freedoms under the law and proud members of Israeli society. **Arab Israelis have full citizenship rights, including the right to vote, while Black Africans in apartheid South Africa had no rights at all. Arab Israelis are doctors, lawyers, professors, business executives, judges, military leaders and high level political figures.**

Israel's relationship with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is different, and in some ways distressing and oppressive. From its reestablishment in 1947 and its acceptance of the U.N. Partition Plan, Israel has hoped to live side-by-side in peace with a Palestinian state—offers which were never accepted by Palestinian leadership. The reality today is very complicated, and potential unilateral action by the Israeli government which would transform the status of the West Bank would make the situation far less straightforward. **Nevertheless, Israel has always aimed to separate from the Palestinians—not to subjugate them.** Comparisons of Israeli society to South

Further Reading:

Why Israel Is Nothing Like Apartheid South Africa (The New York Times)

Response To Common Inaccuracy: Israel is an Apartheid State (ADL)

TROPE

"Zionists are not welcome here [in the racial justice movement]"

Jews are Zionists. Zionism is the liberation movement of the Jewish people—and it is inherent to our Jewish identities. To alienate Zionists from progressive movements is to tell Jews that we are not welcome. In the case of the racial justice movement, Zionist Jews have not only been welcome, but have led. The NAACP was founded by a powerful partnership between American Zionists and Black leaders. American Jews will continue to fight for racial justice because we know that the cause is just—and that our commitment to *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world, mandates it.

Background:

American Jews helped lead the Civil Rights Movement and all movements for justice and equality in America. American Jews in disproportionate numbers marched, organized, gave speeches, donated, provided legal representation, and participated in sit-ins, and the overwhelming majority of Jews are and have always been committed to fighting racism.

We stand on the shoulders of giants. We will continue to show up and serve as allies and accomplices to our BIPOC siblings and neighbors. **Attacks on Jews and "Zionists" in racial justice spaces are antithetical to**

the mission of those spaces, distract from the urgent problem of systemic racism, and divide those spaces at a time when we most need to be united in the pursuit of our shared goals. In response to such attacks, we must continue to show up as our authentic selves: progressive Jews who are proudly Zionist and believe to our core that Black lives matter. We must exemplify the Jewish call to better the world—including standing up for racial justice—and Zioness will put in the work, every day, because our communities are undeniably stronger together.

Further Reading:

Martin Luther King Jr., the Civil Rights Movement, and American Jews (Los Angeles Review of Books)

TROPE

"White nationalism isn't about Jews"/"Jews are privileged white people"

White nationalism is fueled by antisemitism. White nationalists believe that white people are a superior race, and blame the Jews (who they claim have inexplicable and omnipotent power) for the success of justice movements for BIPOC, including the Civil Rights Movement.

Background:

Black people (including Black Jews) are often the physical victims of white nationalism and institutionalized white supremacy in America. It is important to understand that white nationalist ideology is grounded in the intersection of antisemitism and racism. **Jews are one of the primary targets of white nationalists, who believe that their movement cannot succeed until the all-powerful Jews are eradicated.** Further, Jews have been targeted over and over again for their "impure blood," which white nationalists believe is "perverting the white race," and which still drives murderous attacks on synagogues and other Jewish institutions today.

White nationalists have historically sought to turn other oppressed communities against Jews, in order to divide our movements, making all of us exponentially more vulnerable. While most Jews in America do present as white, which is an undeniable privilege in today's America, this does not protect Jews from the dangers of white nationalism or white supremacy. **There is no denying that Black and Jewish Americans are in this fight together, and anyone attacking Jews or Zionists in any justice movement is expressly harming the movement and hindering its progress.**

Further Reading:

Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism (Political Research Associates)

Alt Right: A Primer on the New White Supremacy (ADL)

TROPE

"Israel is a Settler Colonial State"

The Jewish people are Indigenous to the land of Israel and archaeology proves a 3,000 year old connection and history of the Jews having lived there. There were 2 sovereign Jewish polities in this same land, at the end of the 11th century BCE with the Davidic Kingdom and the first Temple in Jerusalem, and in 140 BCE when the Hasmonean dynasty reestablished Jewish independence in Judea.

Israel is arguably history's most successful decolonial achievement—the return of an Indigenous people (the Jewish people) to sovereignty in their ancestral homeland, and the expulsion of the British imperial forces from the region. Accusations of "settler colonialism" work to undermine the Jewish people's historic connection to the land of Israel and imply that Jews are foreign invaders and occupiers, rather than an Indigenous nation violently exiled from their homeland who have maintained a continuous presence there for thousands of years. Typically, people who levy this accusation also say that Israel is a "white colonizer state," which erases the identities and lived experiences of the vast majority of Israelis who are non-white (60% of Israeli Jews are of North African and Middle Eastern descent).

Background

Colonialism is a practice of establishing a long arm of an empire in a foreign land, conquering and subjugating its land and its people, and imposing the practices and the language of the "motherland" on the native population. This concept has no relationship to the modern State of Israel, which saw an "ingathering of the exiles"—the Jewish people returning home after violent expulsion 2,000 years ago—and revived a 3,000 year old language (Hebrew) and culture. Archaeology shows a 3,000 year connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, their historic birthplace and ancestral homeland. There is no Jewish empire, no "motherland" other than Israel that the Jewish people could ever "return to". Acknowledging a centuries long tie between Palestinians and the same land do not factually undermine Jewish indigeneity, and only work to undermine prospects for a peaceful future that recognizes the legitimacy of both peoples' ties to the land and both peoples' need for self-determination in independent polities there.

Further Reading:

The Jewish History of Israel Is Over 3,000 Years Old. That's Why It's Complicated.

The Decolonization Narrative Is Dangerous and False

NYT: Israel Reveals Newly Discovered Fragments of Dead Sea Scrolls

TROPE

"Israel is an Ethnostate"

Israel is a Jewish state whose Declaration of Independence and founding documents refer to the need to balance a Jewish majority with a democracy that provides protections for minorities, including Arabs. The Jewish people are not simply a religious group, but a diverse nation with Indigenous ties to the Land of Israel, whose nationhood is the foundation of their right to sovereignty in a modern state. When people refer to Israel as an "ethnostate," they mean it as a slur, suggesting that there is something inherently racist

in "privileging" Jews above non-Jews in the right to immigrate. But the vast majority of countries in the world have ethnic and/or religious majorities, and privilege members of those majorities in various ways, without this accusation being lobbed to undermine the very legitimacy of their sovereignty.

Background

Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, a sovereign state built by and for the Jewish people—but not exclusively the Jewish people. It is the only Jewish majority country in the world (Jewish people make up only .02% of the population of the world). With a population of 10 million people, including 2 million Arabs, Israel is one of the most multiracial, multi-ethnic and multi-faith countries in the world.

There are more than 50 Muslim-majority countries and 158 Christian-majority countries. 27 countries have enshrined Islam as the official religion of the state; 21 have explicitly deemed Christianity the state religion. Many who accuse Israel of "ethnonationalism" simultaneously defend Palestinian nationalism, which would, by definition, preference Palestinian Muslims and which, in practice in the West Bank and Gaza, have no protections in place for any other ethnic or religious minorities.

Israel's Declaration of Independence states that the "State of Israel will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions…" These mandates are inconsistent with the "ethnostate" slur as it is often applied to Israel.

Further Reading:

Israel's Declaration of Independence

Pew Research Center: In 30 countries, heads of state must belong to a certain religion

ZIONESS

JOIN THE ZIONESS MOVEMENT

Zioness is a coalition of Jewish activists and allies who are unabashedly progressive and unapologetically Zionist. Our grassroots organization includes more than 30 chapters across the country that fight for the advancement of social, racial, economic and gender equality in America and for the inclusion of Zionists in social justice spaces.

www.zioness.org

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