



ACT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2016

**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”
-Martin Luther King, Jr.**

In 1994, Congress designated the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday as a national day of service. On this day, Americans from all walks of life to work together to provide solutions to our most pressing national problems. We also gather to have meaningful conversations to strengthen our communities, bridges barriers, and create solutions to social problems.

IDENTIFY: Who Am I?

Where do I stand?

- Throughout ancient and recent history, Jewish people across the world have overcome eras and acts of discrimination. As Jews have made considerable progress, especially in the United States, what can our story teach us about other struggles for justice in the world? What can it help us understand about race in the United States in 2015?
- People of color have historically faced challenges gaining access to mainstream education. This was an important factor in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and is still very relevant today.
 - On college campuses across the country, students — usually non-white— are raising their voices in protest of what many see as intolerance and discrimination. What role have Jewish students played in this movement?

CONNECT: Who are we?

“For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.” – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Dig Deeper! *Use these activities to help your chapter learn more about racial justice issues and discuss injustice you’ve witnessed in your own community.*

Thinking About Identities:

- Pass around pieces of paper with 6 lines on it, each line starting with: “I am...” Go around clockwise and have each person read one line at a time.
 - For example: “I am Steve / I am male / I am Jewish / I am white / I am a brother”
- Discuss the identities you each wrote down.
 - Are these characteristics that people know right away when they meet you (visible) or ones that they would only know if you told them (invisible)?
 - Go back to your “I am” sheet and mark which are invisible/visible identities with an ‘I’ and ‘V’
- What is power?
 - Are there identities you wrote down that have more power in our society than others?
 - Are there situations where one identity may gain or lose power?
 - What is your capacity to make change? Rate on a scale of small, medium, or large.



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Jews in the Civil Rights Movement: Primary Resources

- “In the 1950s and 1960s, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, now the Union for Reform Judaism, supported the work of the Civil Rights Movement. While many Reform Jews and their congregations applauded the work that the UAHC was doing, some synagogues felt that they were over-stepping their authority. In [this series of letters](#) that span a decade, board members of Hebrew Union Congregation in Greenville, Mississippi, outlined their position as Southern Jews. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations outlines its position in a response”. - Jewish Women’s Archive
 - Questions to consider:
 - What are some things that surprise you about these letters?
 - Do you agree/disagree that “*segregation is not a religious issue and is not a Jewish issue*”? Why or why not?
 - For what reason does the author of the letter conclude that segregation is not a religious issue?
 - One of the topics brought up in the letter is assimilation. What does that term mean?
 - Does assimilation come into play in your life? Think about when you’re with your family, at school, with BBYO.

In the fall 2015, the University of Missouri experienced incidents of both racism and anti-semitism. In September, Peyton Head, a senior and the president of Missouri Students Association, was called racial slurs as he walked near campus. That incident was followed by one on October 5 when members of the Legion of Black Collegians were called the N-word while rehearsing for homecoming festivities. Three weeks later, on October 24, a swastika was drawn with human feces at a university residence hall. The university, at first, did not respond. On October 10, members of Concerned Student 1950, a student group named for the year the first black graduate student was admitted to the university, blocked Tim Wolfe, the college president’s car as it moved through a homecoming parade. On November 2 a student began a hunger strike demanding the resignation of the University president. The President initially refused to resign, but a week later President Tim Wolfe and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin both resigned from their positions.

Racial Justice in Education - The University of Missouri

- What have you heard about college protest movements in the last few months?
- [Use these resources](#) to learn more!
 - Simple timeline of events that led to the president’s resignation at the University of Missouri — this includes an anti-Semitic Incident.
 - “Swastika drawn in residence hall with feces” The Maneater, October 29, 2015
 - Letter of Support from University of Missouri Jewish Student Organization, November 2015
- [Southern Reform Movement Jews](#) who didn’t want to support the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1950s said “segregation is not a religious issue.” What might they think of the student activists?
 - Fill in the blank and share if you agree with the new statement: “_____ is not a religious issue and is not a Jewish issue.”
 - What arguments does Eisendrath use for why the UAHC should have MLK Jr. as a speaker? What arguments does the JSO put forward for canceling classes?
 - What do the JSO letter and the final Civil Rights Letter have in common? Consider goals, words, and tone. Where do they differ?



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IMPROVE: For whom are we responsible?

“...bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence.”- Rabbi Joachim Prinz

What can I do?

There's a range of ways to be involved! Inviting someone outside your community to speak, listening to needs and stories of other minorities, just showing up — not necessarily leading the charge.

Explore Allyship

- Being an ally is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with people and groups who are marginalized in some way.
- [Use these pictures](#) to discuss how Jews were allies of in the 1960s and how we can be allies today.

Move forward

- Bridging communities and getting to know people is an important part of achieving racial justice!
 - [Do service](#) in partnership with an organization that could build bridges between the Jewish community and another you may not engage with often, for example, a church youth group.
- Lead conversations on how to be a good ally, and all the ways in which you can lend support.
- Think of an ongoing movement that you can be an ally for.
 - Write a letter to your congressperson letting them know that the your chapter and local Jewish community support them, or write an open letter like the Jewish Student Organization at the University of Missouri did!