Power of Us
Toward Shared Anti-Oppression Analysis

An offering from the Power of Us partners:

Center for Popular Democracy

Faith in Action

JOIN for Justice

Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative

with the Collaborative for Jewish Organizing

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Acknowledgements

Contents

Introduction

In this time of social and political upheaval, we see the crucial importance of organizing, movement-building, and political analysis for preserving democracy and addressing fundamental inequities. While on one hand, we must take heed of the shadow of the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol and the ongoing threat it represents, we can also hope to move beyond the multiplying crises at hand to the possibility of large-scale reset of the social contract — and beyond that to a society of justice, thriving and liberation. Achieving this transformation will require organizing, power-building, and a lived practice of solidarity at significant scale. The racial justice uprisings ignited by George Floyd's murder were the most recent powerful evidence of the level of change that is needed and can be achieved through Black-led social movements. We must also point to the historic voter turnout of the 2020 elections, and the successful effort to prevent those elections from being overturned as demonstrations of the importance of organizing.

Entering 2020, some of the top organizing and training groups in the country came together to collaborate on a shared analysis and training effort toward the goals of building solidarity and building power together, and strengthening our analysis and training. We named our effort **The Power of Us**. Our team represents significant scale, reach, impact and diversity of institutions — organizations that are not centered in Washington, but rather on the ground in hundreds of organizations across the country. The Center for Popular Democracy has 55 affiliates in 34 states, the Collaborative for Jewish

Organizing's nine organizations work in 19 states and the District of Columbia, and Faith in Action has 55 affiliates working in 27 states. MuslimARC and JOIN for Justice are leading training and education institutions that engage with dozens of institutions and thousands of leaders each year. Our base and our team are unusually diverse, including secular and faith-based, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Black, Latinx, Asian,multi-class, multi-gender. The work we do impacts tens of millions of people, and we directly touch hundreds of thousands of people engaged in organizing.

This document captures highlights from that effort, to make them available for use by trainers, political educators, organizers, and funders working in this space. In addition to this document, we offer **these video excerpts** from the second set of webinars as a complementary resource.

Since the project was launching as the pandemic set in, we were unable to do any in-person work — as a team or with participants. Although immersion and relationship-building in person are key ingredients for the type of work for which the project was created, we were limited to working virtually. Adapting to the Covid realities, we produced two webinar series, totaling seven webinars in total. The first set were oriented around the November 2020 elections, and we offered them to organizers and trainers in our networks (workshop titles and invitation can be seen in the appendix). The team co-created and co-led this set of workshops, which reached fifty organizers and movement people, from two dozen organizations. The webinars asserted and manifested the central importance of solidarity. Participants eagerly engaged with each other and the material, and gained

insights and support for their pre-election and post-election work. The second set of workshops were created and led by one partner, with each session focus being determined by what that partner wanted to lift up and highlight as most significant for the team and for the field. Participants for this second set of webinars were a group of invitees selected for their experience and ability to both offer feedback and spread what they learned.

We agree that our work is intersectional, that we benefit from relationship across difference. We all strive for systemic analysis to catalyze systemic change — while acknowledging that interpersonal and intra-personal aspects of oppression are related. Participants received the workshops with enthusiasm, and the training team created a foundation for strengthening their independent work and creating new collaborations across our large and diverse collective space. We are grateful for the opportunity to work and build together, and share our learnings with others pursuing co-liberation and justice. We believe there is tremendous potential in this work across our networks and identities. Underlying our project are our belief in/value of building power at scale for co-liberation, and the crucial importance of reaching for each other across identities. Here is the framing included in the invitation to our election-related 2020 webinar series.

> *Many organizations have done great work bringing different communities together to develop a collective understanding of the oppressions people face, and build public relationships that enable us to strategize and go into action together. But our oppressions are different, layered and cannot be ignored. But the system works hard to turn our differences into conflict.*

Every time our communities are turned on each other, our work is set back. Black people are being killed in the streets by police. Muslims face vigilante and state violence. Immigrants are still being detained by ICE and torn away from their families- during a pandemic. Many Jews are isolated as they experience the spread of overt anti-semitism and white nationalist violence.

We cannot afford setbacks, especially during these critical months when our collective voices are necessary to push up against increasing political violence. Our democracy and humanity are at stake. Together, we can build on that work and massively expand our circle.

Our commitment to relationships and their transformative power was and continues to be foundational to our approach to co-liberation. **In short, we believe in the power of us, and the necessity of continuing to invest in that.**

> **"We have seen again and again the importance of being in relationship, of real solidarity. Quoting Ecclesiastes, 'A cord of three strands is not easily broken.'" (Ecclesiastes 4:12)**
>
> **— Meir Lakein, JOIN for Justice**

Content Highlights & Areas of Alignment

We are excited to share content highlights from the seven workshops, including areas of alignment. These included:

- the significance of recognizing the role/overlaps/ distinctions between race and other identities, e.g. faith/religion

- the importance of incorporating historical analysis

- the role of Christian dominance/Christian hegemony and the need to define it and incorporate it in our analyses

- the importance of both understanding and elevating the importance of fighting anti-Muslim oppression, which too often is an afterthought in anti-oppression analyses that are not Muslim-led or Muslim-focused

- the challenges and importance of understanding and addressing antisemitism

- the need to draw attention to issues of complicity and choice, and the ways that different groups targeted by oppression may contribute to the oppression of other targeted groups

- the significance of an economic analysis, including a critique of capitalism as it intersects with and relates to issues of oppression and structural inequality

Race, racialization, white supremacy and other identities: All the partners are aligned around the central role that white supremacy plays in understanding dynamics of power, inequality and oppression in the US, including the degree to which the US was built on theft of lands from indigenous people,

enslavement and disenfranchisement of people with African heritage, and exploitation of immigrant labor. Collectively, we absorbed compelling insights about the ways that Muslim identity is racialized, going back centuries, and the significance of the large portion of the US Muslim population who are of African descent, and the racialization of Muslim identity. We learned that while antisemitism can be seen and dismissed as "white people's problems," that erases the huge number of Jewish people who are also Black, indigenous and people of color, and we also raised the question whether Jewish identity is racialized. We saw how anti-Black racism is bound into all the other forms of oppression.

> **"A striking commonality — 92% of us are working on racial justice — the highest percentage compared to any other issue."**
>
> **— Workshop participant**

> **"The uprisings opened up conversations around Blackness and the ways that race and capitalism intersect, and looking at history and current events we see how these systems perpetuate the ways we look at who is human and who is not."**
>
> **— Latrina Kelly-James,**
> ***Center for Popular Democracy***

Christian dominance, its definition and functions, and the need to define it and incorporate it in our analyses. Anti-oppression content too often fails to name and address issues of Christian dominance. Our team took a very different approach. Megan Black presented an emergent analysis about Christian dominance — and its related concepts of Christian hegemony, Christian imperialism, and Christian supremacy. She referenced the use of Christian symbols in the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol. A participant noted that even among our Christian partners/allies who have the intention of inclusion, Christian symbolism and culture can be normative. Thus, for example, we have partners who have carried a cross around the state legislature as part of a coalition lobby day, without understanding how problematic this is. Leo Ferguson and Meir Lakein described the Christian roots of antisemitism. Latrina Kelly-James's workshop dealt with the intersection of racial capitalism and Christianity, noting how aspects of Christianity reinforce concepts of order, with Blackness treated as disorder, and then policing used as a tool to enforce order. Margari Hill taught how in a Christian hegemonic context, Muslims are treated as an Other that must be subdued through violence and conquest, thus rationalizing militarism, with all of its attendant effects. A powerful question arose — "What is the role of non-Christians in addressing Christian dominance? Unlike whiteness, Christianity has an ethical core."

The importance of both understanding and elevating the importance of fighting anti-Muslim oppression, which too often is an afterthought in anti-oppression analyses that are not Muslim-led or Muslim-focused. Pointing out that Muslims are 1 billion people, it is not

just wrong but absurd to treat Muslim experience as peripheral. Moreover, to the degree anti-Muslim bigotry creates the rationale for militarism and violence, its deadly effects are universal. A harsh reminder — the poignancy, in the wake of the January 6 insurrection, which had significant involvement by Christian nationalists — that our Muslim partners need to remind non-Muslims not to use the concept and phrase "domestic terrorism," because of the likelihood it will end up being translated into policy that targets Muslims.

Crucial role of historical information and grounding. The power of historical information and grounding was an ongoing theme. An "ah-ha" moment occurred when Margari taught about the Romanus Pontifex of 1455, directing its readers/subjects to "invade, search out, capture,vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ." We learned that "Saracens" refers to Muslims, "pagans" to Africans, and "enemies of Christ" to Jewish people. Trainers offered historical information and timelines going back to the pre-modern era to provide much-needed depth of understanding.

> **"How does our faith inform our understanding of the 'other'? In this 500-year old document, 'Saracen' means Muslim, 'pagans' means African, and 'enemies of Christianity' means Jews. So this is the kind of intersectional work needed for us to understand the historic moment that shaped the world we live in now — including what happened on January 6."**
>
> **— Margari Hill,** *MuslimARC*

The challenges and importance of understanding and addressing antisemitism. Antisemitism is confusing. With Jews making up only 2% of the US population, many non-Jews have little or no information about Jews and Judaism. Even committed allies may not be aware of what kinds of images and concepts are based in antisemitic tropes, and contribute to conspiracy theories and endanger Jewish people. In fact, as Leo Ferguson taught, a crucial way to understand antisemitism is as an encompassing conspiracy theory, in which Jews are blamed and scapegoated for whatever is causing fear or damage in society, particularly with regard to economic hardship. Thus antisemitism is convenient for attacking and dividing movements that operate across lines of race and religion. Antisemitism is baked into the ideology of the extreme right. For these reasons, and with 10-20% of American Jews being BiPOC, Sephardic and Mizrahi, antisemitism is an issue of concern for all, and must not be dismissed as "white people's problems."

> "The right had owned the conversation about antisemitism in the United States for a long time, and it meant that in a lot of progressive spaces and movement spaces people were afraid to talk about it, because it felt somehow you were talking about a right-wing issue… When you add in our analysis around whiteness and the perception that all Jews are white, it means there was not an appetite to talk about this issue, and there also wasn't a lot of clarity about what antisemitism was and is. Then Trump came in and it became bizarrely and tragically prescient that that work had at last begun."
>
> — Leo Ferguson, *JFREJ*

The need to draw attention to issues of complicity and choice, and the ways that different groups targeted by oppression may contribute to the oppression of other targeted groups. We recognize these dynamics, and believe it is important to build out this analysis further, and develop content and practices that allow participants to apply these insights, to better guide people toward solidarity and allyship.

Select Challenges & Questions

While we share an orientation to grounding our analysis in history, we have different starting points/groundings for our analysis. Some center early and middle ages, and others focus on racial capitalism and its roots.

While the team surfaced many areas of alignment and content that they were excited to adopt and evolve, it is important to notice that **prioritization and sequencing** of issues/topics differ. We realize that deprioritization can functionally become ignoring. This happens all too often in anti-oppression spaces regarding Muslim experience and identity. Our own project, which involved a team of four women and one man, omitted any real engagement with and analysis of gender and women's liberation. An idea for further exploration: is it possible to create a meta-framework that draws on intersectionality, and the reality that various efforts will have different startings points, but without making any people or identities peripheral?

> "In the dominant paradigm, going back hundreds of years, violence is the prescribed strategy for how to deal with Muslims, violence is justified and leads to militarism and exploitation... And what is often erased is the association of Blackness as deeply tied to Muslim identity, going back hundreds of years. Anti-Muslim animus is deeply racialized."
>
> — **Margari Hill,** *MuslimARC*

The team members find value in **critiquing capitalism**, and in particular in understanding the concept of **racial capitalism**, a concept developed by the scholar Cedric Robinson. A critique of racial capitalism is a central feature of Center for Popular Democracy's analysis and training. Other team members had not in the past routinely included this analysis in their anti-oppression frameworks. This is an area where further analysis, content development and partnership will be fruitful. Similarly, since CPD's organizing is not faith-based, its training and analysis has not to this point routinely included focus on faith/religious identities. CPD is now bringing to greater awareness the way that Christianity becomes normative, even in non-faith-based contexts, unless one proactively addresses and corrects for that, and is incorporating understandings of Muslim and Jewish and Christian identities and oppression in its work.

Learnings: Pedagogy & Process

For building a shared analysis across trainers and organizations, it was productive to create **a combination of co-created and individually-led trainings**. A learning: If we had it to do over again, we would start with relationship-building, then attend each others' (unmodified) trainings, and then move to shared curriculum-building/co-creation. This approach would have the benefits of allowing each trainer to lead in their own style and context, whereas starting with co-creation is difficult because of the natural sensitivity to dominating or offending each other. Moreover, we moved to co-creation while still learning about each others' approaches and foundational texts.

We recommend taking more time and creating more conceptual scaffolding to move participants towards deeper understanding of challenging concepts, and more explicitly tie concepts together and have concepts build on each other more consistently. On a related note, we learned that when training on antisemitism and other forms of oppression, it is helpful to **train first on racism and historical conceptions of race, before training on antisemitism.** The information about antisemitism makes much more sense when the training has already addressed white supremacy. The tendency among some to think of antisemitism as solely a problem of white people — which of course doesn't address the reality of BiPOC, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews — can be addressed more effectively when a group has a grounding in racism and white supremacy.

We were reminded of the power of grounding learning in authentic and relevant experiences, and creating opportunities to apply concepts to concrete situations. Thus we had success with and we recommend translating and applying concepts in a case study format. Margari Hill offered a case study on conflict that emerged about Black communities and Arab-owned and South Asian-owned stores in the wake of George Floyd's murder. Latrina Kelly-James offered a case study about the CSX Corporation, which she used to engage participants in issues of racial capitalism and choice. Case study formats were effective in supporting our diverse participants to mesh and think together, which in turn generated enthusiasm about each other, which generates motivation to continue learning and also working together.

Engaging constituents/users in training, even as we are piloting what may be a rough co-created training, is crucial. "Talking about" training, or simulating training one another, is not nearly as effective. The value of road-testing is always worth the effort; without it we don't know how an idea or exercise lands in someone's context, if the idea or exercise even makes sense, etc. Having said that, it is challenging to find a balance between moving to road-testing with real people on one hand, and on the other hand meet needs on the training team for adequate preparation and for building trust and relationship. This tension was particularly high for our project, given the unusual levels of work and personal demands created by the pandemic, volatile political environment, racial justice uprisings, and imminent elections.

> **"I was excited to find others across this powerful set of organizations working in Southern California to — we exchanged emails and began communicating about So-Cal-specific opportunities to work together."**
>
> **— Workshop participant**

The participants who were most consistent over the seven workshops were multi-racial Jews and Muslims. This was in part a function of extra outreach taking place by our Jewish and Muslim team members, but also we found that **these participants were particularly drawn to training spaces where their identities were centered and not an afterthought.** We also concluded that these participants have a particular appetite for what we were offering. This insight is applicable to others who want to be thoughtful about who is centered in training spaces that are intended to be multi-identity/multicultural.

Participants who attended multiple sessions began to build relationships and get invested in one another, even in the course of 90-minute zoom webinars, with people identifying others in their geographic areas, and asking to share contact information. Again, at least a subset of organizers and leaders are really **eager for analysis and organizing relationships across our networks and identities.** There is opportunity here for our team and others to respond to this appetite, including by creating spaces that hold people together for series, versus one-off sessions.

> **We're always centering Christianity when there's all these other beautiful expressions that have nothing to do with dominance and oppression. I want us to have really really strong Jewish organizing centers and Muslim organizing centers and power centers that are not defined by Christian dominance.**
>
> **— Megan Black**

Getting **analysis and political education applied in real-life organizing** — this is both a process and content challenge, and one that trainers can and should help each other with. We understand that this is best practice, and yet this level of preparation requires significant investment of time and resources, and both can be difficult to come by.

This aspect of our learning is somewhat internally-facing, but may also be relevant to others. Our training team was made up of three women of African descent, of whom one is Muslim, and one identifies as Christian, and one as practicing Christian and African indigenous religion, and one white Ashkenazi Orthodox Jewish man. The project manager was a white Ashkenazi Jewish woman. We were all mindful of these identities, and issues of culture and power in the group, with a strong orientation toward sharing power. In building relationships, we found it valuable to explore additional aspects of our experiences and identities, including family structures, geography, religious observance, values, and cultural touchpoints. This depth and nuance and ability to experience our multiple identities strengthened our understanding and relationships. In

a year of upheaval and unpredictability, we strove, over Zoom with some of us never having met in person, to be sources of support for each other — professionally, and politically, and also personally. We enacted the organizing principle of real relationship as a source of both sustenance and change.

> "Relational power may be seen as including three elements: the ability to be actively and intentionally open to the world around us; the capacity to create ourselves out of relationships with others; and the ability to sustain internal relationships, to influence others by having first been influenced by them."
>
> — **Margari Hill,** *MuslimARC*

Conclusion

We are honored to have worked together and strengthened our individual and collective work. We believe in the Power of Us — for our political agendas, for our work in the field and movement, and for the political analysis, training and education we do. Working in this way is resource-intensive, but we are committed to it going forward. One recent example: On April 13, as part of the Center for Popular Democracy's project **"Progressive Leadership: Incorporating an Anti-Oppression Lens into DEI,"** Margari Hill from Muslim Arc participated in a panel discussion on Socialization of Religion and Identity. The panel delved into understanding how historical foundations and racial capitalism inform perceptions of Jewish

and Muslim identity, and identified tools — including data and storytelling tools — to disrupt unexamined socialization in our leadership. Margari was joined by Graie Hagans from Bend the Arc, and Carin Mrotz of Jewish Community Action, two entities that are part of the Collaborative for Jewish Organizing.

We want to continue to do shared work/analysis/political education across our entities. We want to strengthen **analysis, relationship, solidarity, and skills for multi-racial, multi-faith organizing and political education** across our network of hundreds of institutions, thousands of leaders, and millions of constituents. We will incorporate these insights and relationships into our independent ongoing work, and create new collaborations.

Appendices

Selected Resources

- **Video excerpts from second webinar series** (2021)

- J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (2008)

- **Combahee River Collective Statement** (1977)

- Namira Islam, **Soft Islamophobia** (2018)

- **Islamophobia Is Racism Syllabus** (undated)

- **Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project** (undated)

- Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, **Understanding Anti-Semitism: An Offering to the Movement** (2017)

- Carin Mrotz, **"Fighting Antisemitism Is a Critical Piece of a Racial Justice Agenda"** (2021)

- Rise Together Fund, **"Ten Lessons Learned from 10 Years of RTF Grantmaking — Lesson 10: We Must RISE to the Times"** (2019)

- Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983)

- Andrea Smith, **"Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy"** (2016)

- Eric Ward, **"Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism"** (2017)

Key Definitions

Islamophobia

"Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocemntric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintrenance and extension of existing dispaities in eonomic, politial, social and cutural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve 'civizilational rehab' of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended."

— Margari Hill, MuslimARC

Racial Capitalism

An economic and social system that relies on the systematic separation and oppression by race, and exploitation, devaluation, and oppression of people of color, and centering of white male dominance to sustain whiteness and wealth.

- Rooted in anti-Blackness/Blackness as property/capital
- Land theft from and erasure of indigenous peoples

— Latrina Kelly-James, Center for Popular Democracy

Anti-Blackness

A belief that renders people of African descent categorically unacceptable as human beings, irrespective of their intelligence, character, competence, creativity, or achievements.

— Adapted from Dr. Akua Benjamin, who coined the term Anti-Blackness

Antisemitism

Originating in European Christianity, antisemitism is the form of ideological oppression that targets Jews. Via dehumanizing lies, antisemitism ascribes outsize, secret or supernatural powers to Jews, as well as stereotypical personality traits and racial characteristics. In Europe and the United States, it has functioned to protect the prevailing economic system and those who hold power within it by diverting blame for hardship onto Jews.

— Leo Ferguson, JFREJ

Christian hegemony

Christian hegemony is the everyday, pervasive, and systematic set of Christian values and beliefs, individuals and institutions that dominate all aspects of our society through the social, political, economic, and cultural power they wield.

— Megan Black, citing **christianhegemony.org**

White Christian privilege/dominance

White Christian privilege/dominance functions to exempt white Christian-identified people from awareness of awareness of complicity; acts as blinders. "I didn't have anything to do with that…" Creates norms to protect white Christian identity, and pathologizes non-white and non-Christian people, cultures, and communities. Isolates white Christian-identified people from (and inside) solidarity movements.

— Megan Black

Invitation to 2020 Webinar Series

An Invitation: The Power of Us

You are invited to a three-part series designed for organizers and top leaders from the Center for Popular Democracy, Faith in Action, MuslimARC, JOIN for Justice, and the Collaborative for Jewish Organizing.

Together we are investing in a shared anti-oppression analysis to support long-term power-building. This series is by invitation only, and space is limited. Please RSVP at this link no later than Monday 10/5/2020. Confirmation and Zoom information will be sent out a few days before the first session.

These sessions are an invitation to move toward the kind of solidarity, relationship, and clear analysis that we believe is the key to forming powerful coalitions & movements. Our objective is alignment, shared understanding, and deep commitment across our networks to sustained multiracial, multi-religious organizing.

Session One: October 8, 5-630 Eastern: **The Power on the Table:** Opportunities and Challenges in Cross-Faith, Cross-Ethnic Organizing

Session Two: November 9, 5-630 Eastern: **The Power of Us:** Solidarity and Co-Liberation in Faith-Based Organizing

Session Three: December 1 , 5-630 Eastern: **Building Power and Maintaining the Momentum:** Commitment and accountability to an anti-oppression framework

Our team of Co-creators are:

Latrina Kelly-James, *Center for Popular Democracy*

Megan Black, *Faith in Action*

Margari Hill, *MuslimARC*

Meir Lakein, JOIN *for Justice*

More info about our orientation:

We have a short sprint until November 3! It is both a sprint and a long march to collective liberation. There is so much to tear down: anti-Blackness, racism, anti-Muslim bigotry, xenophobia, anti-semitism, sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation. and so much more.

Many organizations have done great work bringing different communities together to develop a collective understanding of the oppressions people face, and build public relationships that enable us to strategize and go into action together. But our oppressions are different, layered and cannot be ignored. But the system works hard to turn our differences into conflict.

Every time our communities are turned on each other, our work is set back. Black people are being killed in the streets by police. Muslims face vigilante and state violence. Immigrants are still being detained by ICE and torn away from their families — during a pandemic. Many Jews are isolated as they experience the spread of overt anti-semitism and white nationalist violence.

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2021 Webinar Series

1/19/21 : Margari Hill, *MuslimARC* — Anti-Muslim bigotry and the three prongs of white supremacy

2/2/21 : Meir Lakein, JOIN *for Justice* and Leo Ferguson, *Jews for Racial & Economic Justice* — How antisemitism should be situated in analyses; common pitfalls

2/9/21 : Latrina Kelly-James, *Center for Popular Democracy* — Choice and Racial Capitalism

2/16/21: Megan Hill, *Faith in Action* — Christian dominance and its ties to white supremacy