



Since we started as co-directors of FBC, most of what we share with our membership and the broader public relates to the issues we work on. However, in light of the comments made by Councilmember Trayon White this week and the attention being paid to the relationship between the Jewish and Black communities (and the intersections within those communities), our personal experiences developing an accountable and honest relationship with each other as a Black woman and a Jewish woman and the ways in which we have each responded to and processed what we've read and seen seem critical to our work and these public conversations. While we unequivocally reject the remarks made, we understand that there is more nuance to this story than has been reported on by the mainstream media.

Below are our personal reflections:

Stephanie:

When I first heard CM T. White Sr.'s comments, I read them within an article that had already identified his statements as being anti-Semitic. I, admittedly, am not familiar with tropes and stereotypes that have been used to persecute my Jewish friends and colleagues, so I can't with all confidence say that I would have independently identified CM. White's statement as anti-Semitic. However, that onus is on me, on CM. White and on others who hope to be in allyship with our Jewish friends and colleagues.

Like many Black families, my family is from the South and bore witness to some of the most vicious examples of homegrown terrorism. My mother grew up in Jim Crow Mississippi and was 16 years old when the news of the 16th St Baptist Church bombing reverberated through Black communities across the country. She taught me to be familiar with the dog whistles we consistently hear levied against Black communities and to be vigilant when I have been confronted with blatant anti-Blackness.

From my understanding of Trayon's experience and his own work to fight displacement and anti-Blackness, I know that we are probably not too far apart in our politics of Blackness. What I know about myself however, is that while I have a lot of knowledge about my own community, I also have a lot of ignorance about other marginalized communities that I hope to become a better ally to. This seems to be the case with Trayon as well.

After seeing my Councilmember being dragged through the national media over what I firmly believe was a poorly thought out video, I thought upon an article I had read last week aptly titled, "[It's Easy to Believe Conspiracy Theories When Your Country Conspires Against You.](#)" One quote in particular has stood out to me, "the black inclination to believe in conspiracy theories is a logical response to the unfathomable institutional oppression we've faced since the first enslaved African stepped foot on America's shores."



While I have come to understand that my Jewish friends and colleagues immediately saw CM. White's statement as a familiar [dog whistle](#), I also understand they come from the experience that many Black Americans have, where we know that we have been plotted against. 'Conspiracy theories' such as the Tuskegee Experiments, MOVE Bombing, the farming of Henrietta Lacks' cells, crack being pushed into Black communities, and more, may surprise non-Black communities, however these narratives are well-known within Black communities and often cited as evidence that any conspiracy is possible.

While CM T. White Sr. clearly did not use his best judgment to further investigate his claims, nor [use resources available](#) to accurately fact check before broadcasting to his large Facebook following, I wonder would he have made national news if he had espoused some of the same anti-Black statements and policy that we see coming from the dais on a regular basis.

I urge both those offended, as well as those confused about the anti-Semitism within CM T. White's remarks to dive into some resources both on the prevalence of anti-Blackness, as well as anti-Semitism so that we can be better allies to each other and use moments such as this to call each other in, rather than scapegoat each other. I hope that we are all pushed by this incident to learn more about each other, show up for each other when we falter and do better to show allyship with other marginalized communities. That is the only way that we win. I also hope in the future that the same Councilmembers who justly decried CM. White's statements, respond just as quickly and as vocally when their other colleagues espouse anti-Black sentiments and push forward anti-Black policies.

[Charlottesville Syllabus and Resources for Anti-Racist Work](#)
[Dismantling Anti-Black Bias in Democratic Workplaces: A Toolkit](#)
[Historian Says Don't 'Sanitize' How Our Government Created Ghettos](#)
[The Case For Reparations](#)
[Black-Jewish Relations Intensified And Tested By Current Political Climate](#)
[The Alliance Between America's Black and Jewish Activists Has Long Been Troubled](#)
[Understanding Anti-Semitism: An Offering to Our Movement: A Resource from Jews for Racial and Economic Justice](#)

Monica:

I was instilled from a young age with a very clear understanding of anti-Semitism. My last name, Kamen, is itself a reaction to anti-Semitism. When my great grandfather came to this country, his last name was Kamenkovitz. Kamen is much less identifiably Jewish.

I was taught that when I hear "Jews have money and power," that I should be triggered to the warning sign of coming persecution- Jews cannot and should not get comfortable in America. I've long understood how anti-Semitism has shaped the American Jewish community, our



religious practices, our politics, how we see ourselves in the world, and how we relate to people of other backgrounds.

However, I was instilled with this understanding without any corresponding education about other forms of oppression and how other peoples' inherited and living trauma shape communities. Racism, I was taught, was about interpersonal bigotry and thrived only in communities that also hated Jews. Jews and African Americans were natural allies because we've both been persecuted and othered. There was very little self examination about how Jewish communities perpetuate racism, against both Jews of color and non-Jewish people of color, or how Ashkenazi Jews became white in America and benefit from privilege.

As an adult, my worldview has broadened, as I've gained a clearer understanding of the histories, traumas, and experiences of people who aren't Jewish. I've been blessed with a diverse group of peers and colleagues who I learn from every single day, even when its not their responsibility to teach me.

Also as an adult, I've felt uncomfortable in many Jewish spaces because my politics are considered subversive or self hating or too radical for the Jewish institutions that raised me. Like many other progressive Jews, I feel left with few outlets to talk about anti-Semitism. I don't want to detract from conversations about racial justice. I don't want to strictly examine Anti-Semitism through the lens of Israel-Palestine. So instead, I don't address microaggressions, though I've been told in passing conversation that Jews control New York City, or have amassed all the money and power in DC. I don't bring up Anti-Semitism in movement spaces when we talk about oppression, though there has been an alarming increase in Anti-Semitic incidents across the country. And I honestly don't know how to talk about Anti-Semitism in Black communities when my identity and my values come into tension.

So I was overcome when Councilmember White's comments brought all of these issues to the fore for me. For the reasons I described, I was triggered by his Post, and like other Jewish people, I was incredibly saddened, confused and disappointed.

These feelings existed alongside an overwhelming feeling of disgust by the blowback that Councilmember White received. I read offensive, racist, and hateful rhetoric pouring from social media accounts. I saw a national news story being made of an obvious mistake of judgement, though both former and sitting councilmembers have never been called to account for the countless racist comments that I have personally witnessed. Like when Mary Cheh grilled a Black woman about where her child's father was during a hearing about Rapid Rehousing. Or when Yvette Alexander forced a room full of homeless women and domestic violence survivors to pledge not to have anymore children- both serving to perpetuate stereotypes about Black women, distract from the real systemic issues, delegitimize these women's experiences and



blame them for their circumstances. There was no public outcry- just a quiet acceptance that Anti-Black racism is normal.

There were also responses to Councilmember White that were filled with generosity and nuance (shout out to Jews United for Justice and many of the Jewish, progressive leaders in DC), but overwhelmingly, I saw white Jewish people and institutions insult the intelligence of both a remarkable, young, Black Councilmember and the Black constituents that elected him. And I also saw responses on the other side, of people ashamed of the Councilmember's apology, of people insisting that he did nothing wrong and was just speaking truth.

All of these truths exist at once.

I'm grateful to the FBC community for giving me space to open this dialogue. I'm grateful to Stephanie, for Aja, for Amber, for Zach for helping me understand new perspectives, and for Councilmember Trayon White for his apology, for his sincerity and for opening his office to me to talk about how we can open this conversation and have an honest examination of the relationship between Jewish and Black communities.

From both of us:

These relationships can be messy. This work gets painful. But this moment calls for us to continue to dialogue, to bring to the surface tensions that have only been aired behind closed doors and to listen and be accountable when we hurt each other. We have faith that Trayon has begun this work and I encourage all of us to think deeply about what more we can do to align ourselves in opposition to the rise of global white supremacy. Our traumas don't exist at the exclusion of others'. Part of the challenge is sharing our truths and really hearing each other.