



on Racial Justice: Shabbat Dinner Host Guide

A closer look at racial justice and privilege.

An initiative of Repair the World, in partnership with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, OneTable and Gather

Adapted from the full guide available at www.turn-the-tables.org/host-a-dinner



WELCOME TO TURN THE TABLES

DEAR HOST,

The following guide is the result of a partnership between Repair the World and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC). **Repair the World** is a national nonprofit that mobilizes Jews to give time and effort to the causes they're passionate about. **The Religious Action Center** is the DC office of the Union for Reform Judaism and the hub for Reform Jewish social justice and legislative activity. On behalf of both organizations, we want to THANK YOU for joining us in honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by hosting a **Turn the Tables on Racial Justice Shabbat Dinner** as part of Points of Light's MLK Day Sunday Suppers (<http://bit.ly/1aG3y12>). On **January 15, 2016**, you will join thousands of people across the country in dining together and engaging in important dialogue about issues of racial injustice impacting communities and specifically our education system.

Racial injustice undermines hope, squanders potential, devastates communities and costs lives. We believe that racial justice must be addressed with a variety of approaches, namely **reflection, relationship-building and reform**. We recognize that service can play a critical role in all three by relating with others across contexts, by serving as a way to act in solidarity with (and not for) your community, by disrupting some of the systems that reinforce inequity and by addressing urgent short-term needs that broader efforts may neglect to rectify. We do service to build solidarity with our neighbors and with marginalized communities, among Jews, among non-Jews and among the increasing number of Jews of color. Service, done right, can **support forward momentum in the racial justice movement**.

We also recognize the importance of **advocacy** for bringing about systemic change in the area of racial justice. Through legislative action, we can begin to address **the structures and institutional policies** that perpetuate racial discrimination and inequity, from housing and employment to criminal justice and public health. Advocacy provides us with the tools to influence the hearts and minds of decision-makers and to bring our collective vision for a just society free of racism closer to reality.

Finally, we believe that structured yet organic dialogue about critical social issues is a **key catalyst that leads us to engage more deeply in both service and advocacy**. We hope that these conversations help ensure that our actions are thoughtful and intentional, leading to action in solidarity with our neighbors.

This **Host Guide** contains several different discussion activities to help you facilitate constructive and meaningful conversations. Please use the activities that most resonate with you and your guests. While some activities are designed to be Shabbat-friendly, feel free to adapt the activities to best meet all customs and personal needs.

We hope that you and your guests leave your dinner with a heightened **AWARENESS** about racial injustice in your local community, having had the opportunity to **SPEAK UP** about complex issues surrounding racial justice and feel driven to **TAKE ACTION**. MLK Day is a national day of service, where tens of thousands of people will be honoring MLK's vision to create a more just America. You can join them at weRepair.org or www.rac.org.

It's because of leaders like you that the world can change: table by table and city by city. Thanks again for all you do – and all you will do to make this dinner possible!

The Repair the World team
weRepair.org

The Religious Action Center
www.rac.org



PREPARATION

A **Turn the Tables Shabbat Dinner** has several ingredients: a tasty meal, some meaty (or vegetarian) conversation about important issues, and an opportunity to get involved.

GETTING STARTED

1. **Read through the Host Guide in its entirety** before choosing which portions you wish to use for your dinner.
2. **Collect and print the necessary materials** and supplies as outlined throughout the **Host Guide**.
3. Print a copy of the **Respectful Conversations** sheet to have on hand throughout your dinner and to review in advance. It offers guidelines for facilitating fair and meaningful discourse about sensitive subjects.
4. As you read through the guide, be mindful of the space and environment in which you will host your dinner. Think about how you want to set up the seating so it's conducive to respectful conversation and dialogue.

SIMMER, DO NOT BOIL.

Productive discomfort is encouraged.

Feeling slightly uncomfortable and stretching a bit out of your comfort zone can generate learning and growth. Before starting the program, take a few minutes for your guests to understand your intention in maintaining a safe space that allows each of you to experience some productive discomfort during the evening. You might consider sharing the **Respectful Conversations** sheet with everyone present.

WHET YOUR APPETITE

Serving the Appetizer: Opening Activity

We believe that setting intentions for our conversations about racial justice is critical to fostering a productive, respectful and inclusive experience. The **“UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATER”** activity asks you to begin your dinner by reflecting on the ritual of hand washing before a Shabbat meal. The goal of this activity is to start the meal by holding both the dreams we have for a just world as well as the ways we are complicit in perpetuating injustice.

Choosing and Digesting your Discussion Entrée

Select the entrée below that you'd like to chew on. Each option takes a look at a different aspect of racial justice. Feel free to mix and match pieces from different entrées during your meal or use the sources in the final option to guide your own discussion.

- *Discussion Entrée Option 1: A Lesson on Privilege (via BuzzFeed)*
This entrée asks guests to read and reflect on **an illustrated portrayal of privilege in a classroom** setting from [Buzzfeed](#).
- *Discussion Entrée Option 2: Beit Midrash: Jewish Perspectives on Civil Rights*
This discussion option features a series of documents describing the contentious and **shifting attitudes of**

the Reform Jewish community toward Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and asks guests to reflect on how these documents inform our understanding of Jewish involvement in past, present and future efforts to achieve racial justice.

- *Discussion Entrée Option 3: Create Your Own and Additional Resources*

Concluding with Dessert: Closing Reflections

Just as we conclude our meal on a high note with dessert, we want to conclude our conversations with an opportunity for reflection.

TAKE ACTION!

Repair the World's MLK Day 2016 campaign (<http://bit.ly/1mAzRHD>) focuses on inspiring the Jewish community to **volunteer** to honor Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy of service and to **engage** in conversation about issues of racial justice.

MLK Day is a national day of service, where tens of thousands of people will be honoring Martin Luther King Jr's vision to create a more just America. You can join them by visiting weRepair.org.

You can get involved with the Union for Reform Judaism and the RAC's campaign on racial justice at www.rac.org/racial-justice. Take action to end mass incarceration by telling Congress to pass comprehensive sentencing reform at www.rac.org/criminal-justice.

And don't forget to tell us how it goes! Email Repair the World at mlk@werepair.org and the RAC at awaters@rac.org. Or connect with us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram: @RepairtheWorld, @TheRAC, #TurntheTables.

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT

While we can't help you cook dinner, we can help you prepare for your Turn the Tables program. The team at Gather (<http://gathering.co/>) is here to help you at every step of the way with tools, book suggestions, discussion questions, recipes, hosting tips and more.

As your Gather concierge, **Elyse invites (and encourages!) you to set up a call**, so she can help you coordinate everything from the discussion questions to the food for your Turn the Tables Shabbat Dinner. Click here to choose a time that works best for you: <https://calendly.com/elysekort/30min>.

Have a question, need clarification or want to get more involved with Repair the World's or the RAC's campaigns? Reach out to us at awaters@rac.org and mlk@weRepair.org.

RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand in times of challenge and controversy.

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

OVERALL TIPS

The first step to working towards a better society is to talk openly and honestly about the issues that affect our communities. Talking about racial justice is challenging, which is why this section about HOW to have the conversation is much longer than the actual discussion questions! As the host, you are responsible for creating a safe space in which guests can express their opinions thoughtfully and openly, ask difficult questions, and where the feelings of the group are valued and protected.

- **Acknowledge that racial injustice is complicated and far-reaching; we're not going to cover all aspects of this issue.**
- **Appoint a facilitator.**
- **Acknowledge that you or your guests might have moments of discomfort – and that it's okay.**
- **Establish group ground rules.**
- **Do not tokenize people – everyone should only speak from their personal experience.**
- **Ensure that everyone who wants to speak, gets a chance to speak.**
- **Be respectful of introverts – and of silence.**
- **Avoid the terms “right” and “wrong.” Try not to use charged language.**
- **If you're offended, share – don't blame. Use “I” statements to avoid blame.**
- **Provide context.**
- **Don't get stuck in facts.**

DIGGING IN

APPOINT A FACILITATOR. Before your meal, decide among your guests who should lead the discussion. The best leader is likely you, but ask a friend if you're not comfortable in that role. A facilitator guides the discussion, but does not dominate it. If things get out of hand, or if voices are being blocked out, the facilitator intervenes.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR GUESTS MIGHT HAVE MOMENTS OF DISCOMFORT. It can oftentimes be the elephant in the room, but in many cases, it helps to say out loud what others are feeling: “I know we don't usually talk about racial justice at the dinner table, and it might make you or others feel uncomfortable, and that's ok.”

ESTABLISH GROUP GROUND RULES. Before your dinner program begins, collectively establish a set of rules for your discussion. These could be formal, such as “whoever holds this spoon speaks,” or “if you agree, snap your fingers.” These rules could also be informal, including “whatever is said in this room, stays in this room.”

DO NOT TOKENIZE PEOPLE. Individuals can only speak to their own experiences. Do not look to others to speak on behalf of their race, gender, or ethnicity.

ENSURE THAT EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO SPEAK, GETS A CHANCE TO SPEAK. Very frequently, individuals who are most comfortable expressing their opinions out loud can dominate conversations. The facilitator

should respectfully ask for the opinions of others if a few voices begin to dominate the conversation.

BE RESPECTFUL OF INTROVERTS – AND OF SILENCE. Make sure the facilitator is noticing who is not speaking. Encourage those individuals to contribute, but do not force them. Similarly, if the conversation reaches a point of silence, do not push people to speak. Be respectful of reflection.

IF THE DISCUSSION BECOMES HEATED OR UNCOMFORTABLE

AVOID “RIGHT” AND “WRONG.” While some opinions are commonly accepted as “right,” it is unproductive for conversations like these to cast someone’s statements or beliefs as “wrong.”

IF YOU’RE OFFENDED, SHARE – DON’T BLAME. Ignorance is not animosity. Use the “I felt....when you...” format to discuss how you personally perceived someone’s statement. You could say, for example, “I felt offended when you said that your grandfather worked himself into the middle class, and therefore anyone could achieve the American dream if they tried hard enough. In my experience, some of the opportunities available to your grandfather weren’t available to a lot of people because of formal or informal restrictions and institutional racism.”

TRY NOT TO USE CHARGED LANGUAGE. If someone says something offensive, assume that they simply do not realize that they have said something hurtful. Calling them a racist is one surefire way to make the situation a lot worse. Use the opportunity to share what has offended you and to educate.

PROVIDE CONTEXT. Even though it’s difficult, try to explain why you believe what you believe. Provide examples, facts and stories to illuminate your opinions, and encourage others to do the same.

DON’T GET STUCK IN FACTS. People often claim truth or fact to back up their opinions without considering other people’s perspectives or the limitations of their own knowledge. Remind people that this is a conversation. Everyone’s personal experience matters. Recommend that people share information to deepen the discussion, not to shut down the conversation.

*Never forget: This very moment, we can change our lives. There never was a moment, and never will be, when we are without the power to alter our destiny. This second, we can **turn the tables** on resistance. This second, we can sit down and do our work. -Steven Pressfield*

APPETIZER: OPENING ACTIVITY

“UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATER”¹

Items Needed:

- One copy of hand washing blessings and meditations
- A pitcher or large cup of water and a large bowl to create a handwashing station
- A towel/paper towels

Framing:

Traditionally, Shabbat is time set aside at the end of the work week for rest and reflection on both the days that have passed and the days to come. It is also often regarded as an opportunity to return to the metaphorical “Garden of Eden” and imagine the world as it could be, before heading back into the work of creating that ideal in the coming week.

Judaism offers many connections between ritual and water- for marking transitions, welcoming guests and preparing to eat a meal. The ritual of hand washing before a Shabbat meal, as an extension of the hand washing some engage in before every meal, is intended to help bring about that moment of ideal - to wash away the impurity that exists in the world and provide the opportunity during Shabbat to imagine something better. In the context of the conversation you are about to engage in, there is something incredibly powerful about taking a moment to imagine a world free of racial injustice, and also something incredibly troubling about the notion of “washing one’s hands clean” of an injustice we are all inherently complicit in.

With the “UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATER” activity, we encourage you and your guests to start your meal by imagining the ideal AND by recognizing the things we cannot wash clean. With this intention, we prepare ourselves for the conversations we will have tonight and the work we commit to continuing in the days, weeks and years to come.

Host Instructions:

In advance of your dinner, set up a pitcher or large cup filled with water alongside a large bowl.

At the beginning of the dinner, we encourage you to begin with the Shabbat rituals of lighting candles and making *kiddush* to set the tone for your Shabbat meal (you can find a Friday Night Blessings for Shabbat sheet at <http://bit.ly/1YxYYMg>). Feel free to also bring in other Shabbat customs that you or your guests have. A friendly explanation of these rituals, as you understand them, can be informative and useful for the people at the table.

Before saying Hamotzi (the blessing over bread) and/or starting your entrée conversation, we encourage you to pause and facilitate the following activity.

NOTE: There is some God language and Jewish ritual in the following activity and blessings. Invite your guests to interpret it in the way that both feels comfortable to them and encourages them to explore different perspectives. If Shabbat rituals aren’t your thing, feel free to complete the prompts without the hand washing.

¹ From MLK’s address at Holt Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, 1955.

Share with guests:

Shabbat is traditionally a time set aside at the end of the work week for rest and reflection on the days that have passed and on the days to come. It is also often regarded as an opportunity to return to a metaphorical “Garden of Eden” and imagine the world as it could be, before heading back into the work of creating that ideal in the coming week.

The ritual of hand washing before a Shabbat meal is intended to help bring about that moment of ideal - to wash away the impurity that exists in the world and provide the opportunity during Shabbat to imagine something better. For some, this act is part of a broader Jewish practice of the washing of hands in moments of transition and reflection, such as waking up in the morning or on leaving a cemetery. Each of these frameworks pushes us to recognize what we are both leaving and entering into in that moment.

In the context of the conversation we are about to engage in, there is something incredibly powerful about taking a moment to imagine and dream of a world free of racial injustice, and also something incredibly troubling about the idea of washing away something that we cannot “wash our hands clean” of - an injustice we are all inherently complicit in.

To honor that tension, we are going to start our meal by both imagining the ideal AND by recognizing the things we cannot wash clean.

"I say to you today, my friends, though, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream." - Martin Luther King, Jr. “I Have a Dream...” (1963)

Ask guests to go around the table and share two things:

- A dream they have for a more racially just world; and
- A brokenness that we cannot wash away as we go into this conversation.

Conclude by inviting guests to each ritually hand-wash using any of the blessings or meditations that resonate with them on the Handwashing Blessings and Meditations sheet.

Share that there is a Jewish custom of observing a silence between handwashing and reciting the blessing over the bread/eating the meal. Silence can mean a lot of things. It can reflect a person's shyness or reticence to raise a difficult point. It can express disengagement or apathy, or even frustration, anger or judgment. It can indicate that those present are taking in the true depth of what has just been shared, weighing their thoughts and feelings and intentionally considering how to respond. This potential uncertainty about a silence's meaning can leave us feeling unsettled and uncomfortable, feelings exacerbated by racial overtones of silencing others in public and private conversations.

Encourage guests to lean into this silence as a reminder of the need for allies, in racial or other justice contexts, to temper their own words, to listen to those who experience oppression and to create spaces where marginalized individuals can tell their own stories.

HANDWASHING BLESSINGS AND MEDITATIONS SHEET

MEDITATIONS BEFORE HAND WASHING

Martin Luther King Jr, "I have a Dream...", March on Washington." (1963):

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Yitz Greenberg, The Jewish Way

Tradition specifies that, for ritual washing, the water be poured over the hands by human agency, not by Machine or faucet. The point is that awakening consciousness cannot be accomplished by mechanical means. Usually you pour water on your own hands (on the right hand first), but pouring can also be done by someone else as a mark of love or friendship. It is also customary to be silent from the moment of washing until the challah is broken and eaten. The mind is concentrated, and consciousness focuses on the bread and the meal to follow.

BLESSINGS FOR HAND WASHING

Traditional Blessing:

Before the meal, each person washes hands by filling a cup with water and pouring it over the top and bottom of the right hand and then the left hand. Before wiping the hands dry on a towel, the following blessing is traditionally recited.

<p>ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על נטילת ידים</p>	<p>Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim.</p>
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Blessed are You, Lord, our God, ruler of the Universe, who sanctifies us with commandments, and commands us concerning washing of hands.

June Kozak Kane, Nitilat Yadayim

After reciting the nitilat yadayim (hand washing) blessing, visualize the hand washing cup as being filled with blessings. Wash each hand front and back three times, alternating from right to left.

First washing:

While washing right hand front and back, think or say:

"May all paucity of spirit or negativity be removed from me."

While washing left hand front and back, think or say:

"May blessings come to me all day to benefit the world."

Second washing:

Right hand: "May all my dear ones experience a removal of any negativity."

Left hand: "May all my dear ones experience a renewal of blessings."

Final washing:

Right hand: "May all negativity be removed from the world."

Left hand: "May the entire world experience a renewal of blessings and may all receive everything they need for good health."

DISCUSSION ENTREE: OPTION 1

A LESSON ON PRIVILEGE (via **Buzzfeed**)

Items Needed:

- Copies of source sheets
- Scrap paper (optional)
- Recycling bin (optional)

Framing:

In November 2014, BuzzFeed's Nathan Pyle shared a powerful lesson about privilege using a recycling bin and some scrap paper that went viral, with over 4.8 million views. Comics and simulations can be interesting lenses into current issues and can spark deep reflections. We hope that by examining how the following comic tackles different ways of understanding privilege you and your guests will be able to approach the conversation about racial justice from different perspectives.

Facilitator/Host Instructions:

The facilitator should begin by handing out the source sheets and reading the text out loud. Guests are encouraged to simulate the teacher's exercise by using the scrap paper and placing a bin at the front of the room.

Guiding Questions:

- What do you think about this exercise?
- In what grade do you think it would be appropriate to start teaching students about privilege? Why?
- Which pieces of the exercise resonate with you and which pieces do not?
- What does this comic suggest about privilege in a classroom or school setting? How can its lessons also be applied outside of the classroom?
- What might be too simple about this exercise?
- What additional factors, if any, would you add to this exercise so that it better represents privilege?
- What do you think about using simulations to teach youth about privilege? What are the benefits and the risks of doing so?
- How can we use this simulation to inform our conversations about racial justice?

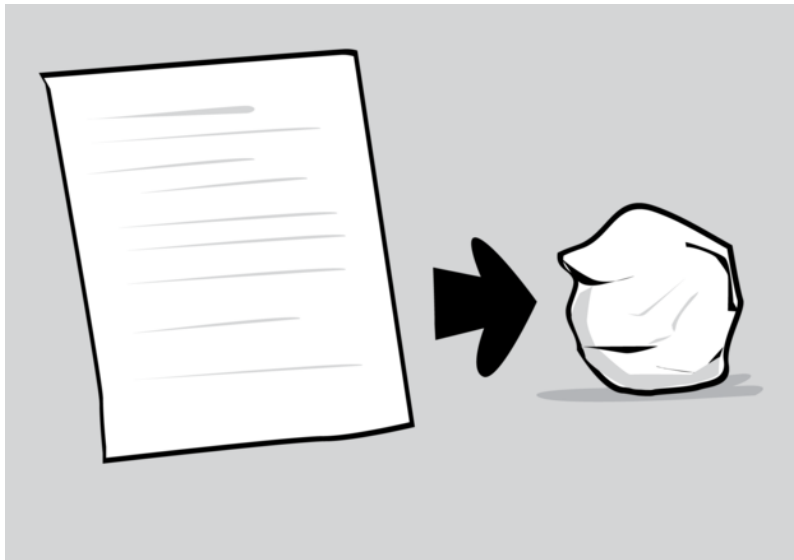
SOURCE SHEET

This Teacher Taught His Class A Powerful Lesson About Privilege

With a recycling bin and some scrap paper.

Pyle, Nathan W. "This Teacher Taught His Class A Powerful Lesson About Privilege." BuzzFeed. 21 Nov 2014.

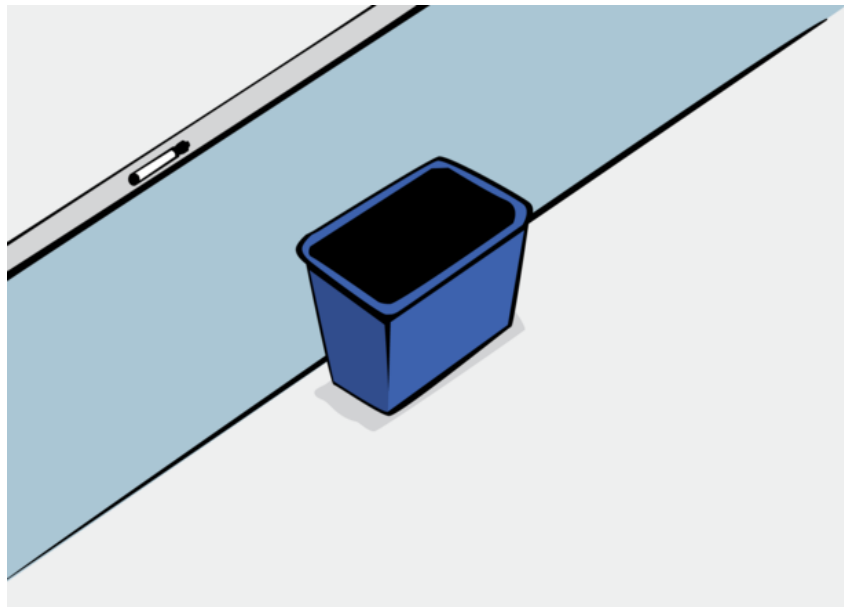
Web. <http://bzfd.it/1vzfQNZ>.



I once saw a high school teacher lead a simple, powerful exercise to teach his class about privilege and social mobility. He started by giving each student a scrap piece of paper and asked them to crumple it up.

Nathan W. Pyle / Via buzzfeed.com

Then he moved the recycling bin to the front of the room.



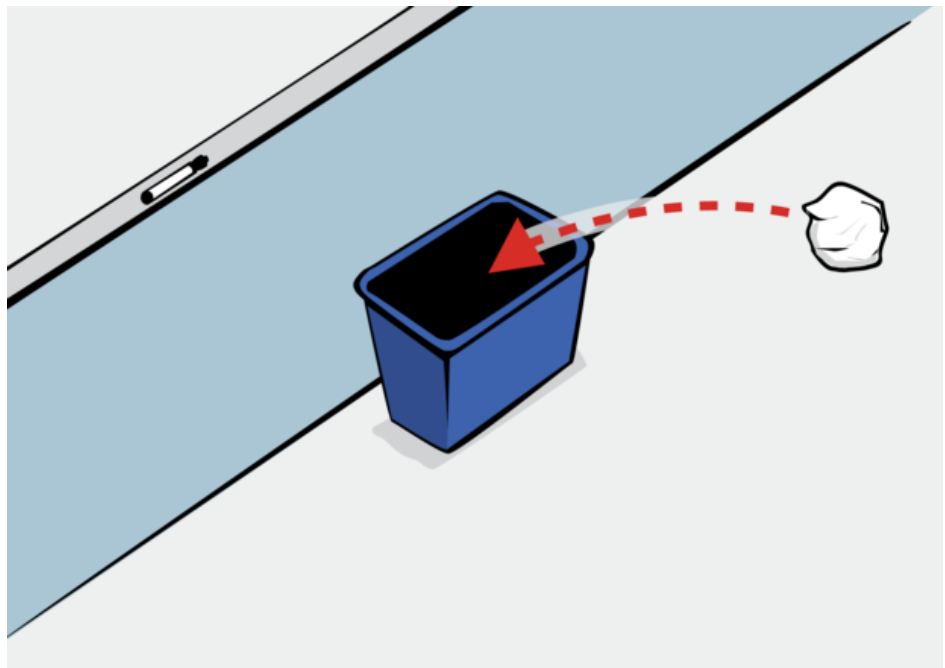
Nathan W. Pyle / Via buzzfeed.com

He said, “The game is simple — you all represent the country’s population. And everyone in the country has a chance to become wealthy and move into the upper class.”

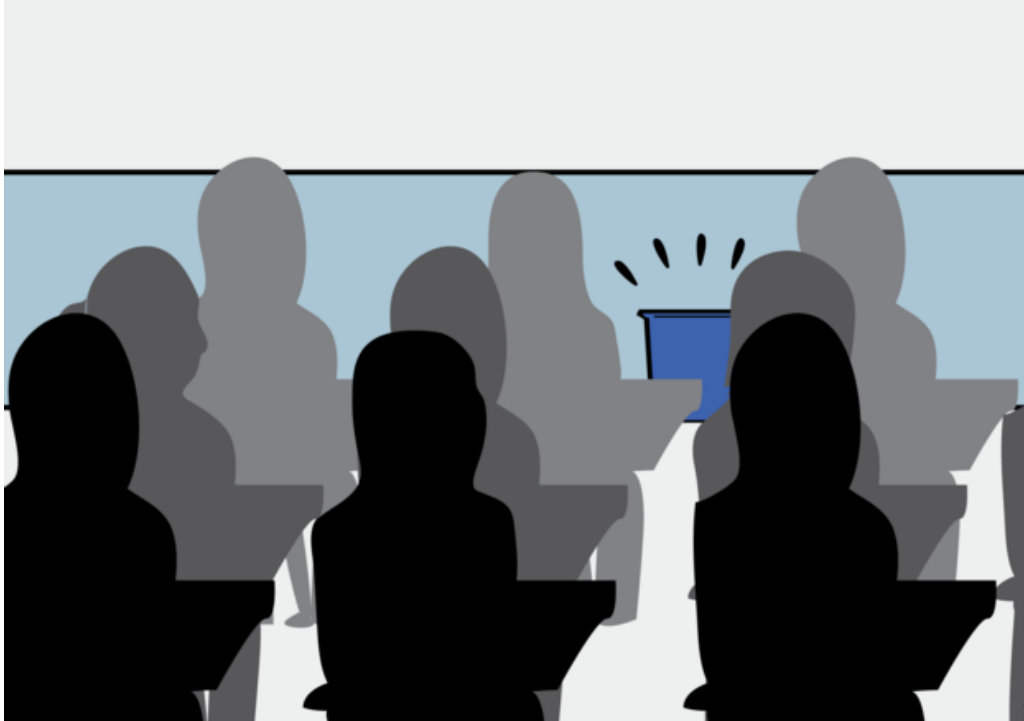


Nathan W. Pyle / Via [buzzfeed.com](https://www.buzzfeed.com)

“To move into the upper class, all you must do is throw your wadded-up paper into the bin while sitting in your seat.”



Nathan W. Pyle / Via [buzzfeed.com](https://www.buzzfeed.com)



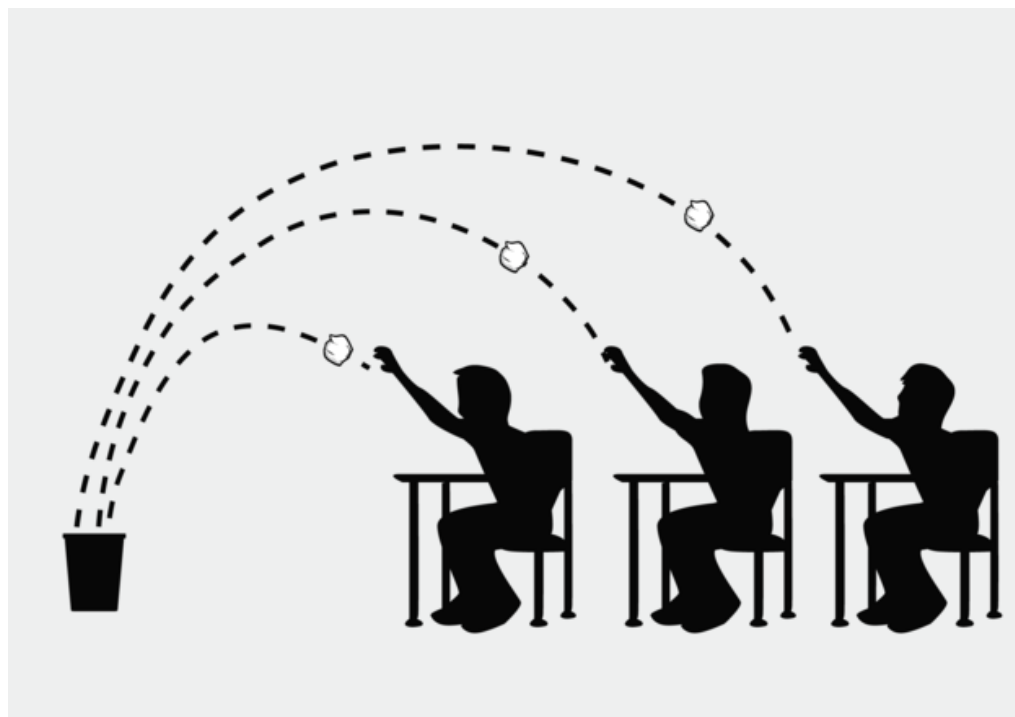
The students in the back of the room immediately piped up, “This is unfair!” They could see the rows of students in front of them had a much better chance.

Nathan W. Pyle / Via [buzzfeed.com](https://www.buzzfeed.com)

Everyone took their shots, and — as expected — most of the students in the front made it (but not all) and only a few students in the back of the room made it.



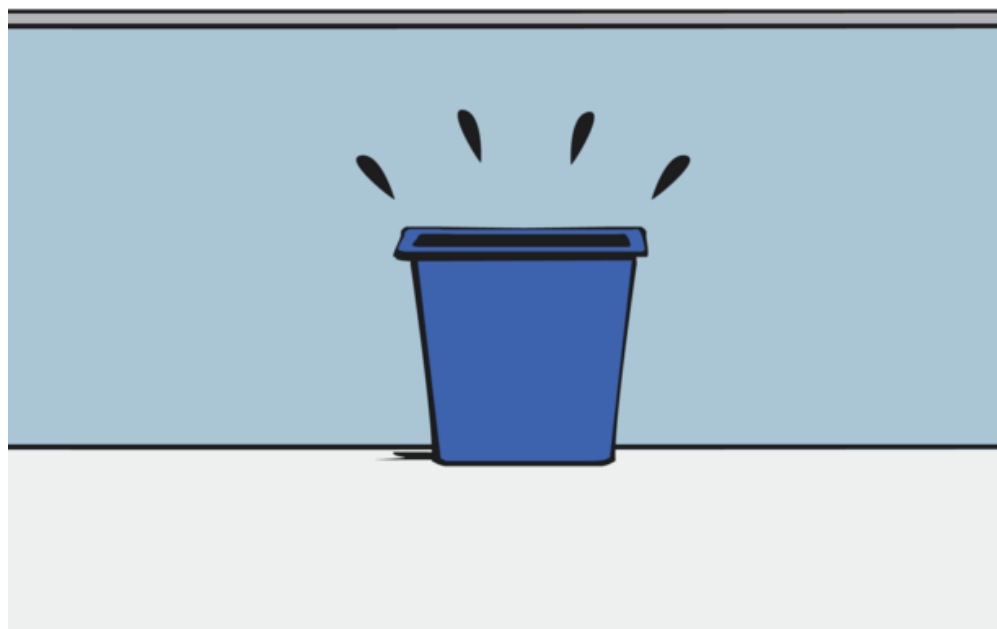
Nathan W. Pyle / Via [buzzfeed.com](https://www.buzzfeed.com)



He concluded by saying, “The closer you were to the recycling bin, the better your odds. This is what privilege looks like. Did you notice how the only ones who complained about fairness were in the back of the room?”

Nathan W. Pyle / Via buzzfeed.com

“By contrast, people in the front of the room were less likely to be aware of the privilege they were born into. All they can see is 10 feet between them and their goal.”



Nathan W. Pyle / Via buzzfeed.com

“Your job — as students who are receiving an education — is to be aware of your privilege. And use this particular privilege called “education” to do your best to achieve great things, all the while advocating for those in the rows behind you.”

Guiding Questions:

- What do you think about this exercise?
- In what grade do you think it would be appropriate to start teaching students about privilege? Why?
- Which pieces of the exercise resonate with you and which pieces do not?
- What does this comic suggest about privilege in a classroom or school setting? How can its lessons also be applied outside of the classroom?
- What might be too simple about this exercise?
- What additional factors, if any, would you add to this exercise so that it better represents privilege?
- What do you think about using simulations to teach youth about privilege? What are the benefits and the risks of doing so?
- How can we use this simulation to inform our conversations about racial justice?

DISCUSSION ENTREE OPTION 2

BEIT MIDRASH²: JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Items Needed:

Copies of letters (see below)

Host Instructions:

Share the below framing with guests and hand out copies of attached letters and Guiding Questions. Ask guests to find a partner and read through the documents together, referring to the Guiding Questions to prompt discussion.

Framing:

In honor of MLK Jr. Day, in this Beit Midrash you will look at the ways different Reform Jewish leaders and thinkers reacted to the civil rights movement during the time of MLK Jr., and use it to reflect on how the Jewish community is reacting today to calls for racial justice. As you go through these sources, try to imagine the context from which they emerged. Is the conversation that the Jewish community had during “the Civil Rights Movement” the same conversation we are having today? Why or why not? If so, what does this mean? As always, bring your own analyses of power and privilege (internal and structural) into your reading.

A Note about Guiding Questions: The Guiding Questions listed at the end of the texts are a jump-off point for your conversation. They are not meant to constrain your conversation, but rather to provide a trigger for a deeper, more organic dialogue with a partner.

Beit Midrash Guideline: Remember to read each source out loud together with a partner. Spend some time wondering about it out loud together before referring to the guiding questions. Read the guiding questions together. Allow space for each partner to have the opportunity to share a response. This is a dialogue and a conversation! Sometimes sources won’t make sense. Sometimes they challenge your perspectives. That’s ok. Struggle with the sources! It is part of the total experience.

Sources

Primary Sources: Letters to and from the Union of American Hebrew Congregation debating the movement’s position on segregation as well as the honoring of Dr. MLK Jr. The attached documents are from the **Jewish Women’s Archive**.

Context: “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 a 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

² Beit Midrash is Hebrew for “house of study,” or place where the students of Jewish Law gather to listen to the discourse or exposition of the Law. Here this term designates a space to engage together in text study.

May 1, 1956

Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, President
The Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York 21, N.Y.

Dear Rabbi Eisendrath:
Your letter addressed to Mr. Sam Weil as President
of the Greenville Hebrew Union Congregation was
presented to the Board of Directors for discussion.

It was the unanimous opinion of the Board that
segregation is not a religious issue and is not a
Jewish issue. It is further felt by the Board that
regardless of the merits or demerits of either side
of the question, there should be no one or no or-
ganization that makes a public utterance which may
be interpreted as speaking for the Jews of America
as a whole.

We know full well that any public utterance showing
the Jews as a whole favor desegregation will have the
direct effect of hurting the Jews' position in the
South and would not reflect their true sentiment.
This is especially true as the Southern Jews have
established a very fine relationship with the white
non-Jews of the South. We believe this harmonious re-
lationship between the Jews and the non-Jews in the
South is due in a large respect to the personal conduct,
cultural progress and adherence to the customs which
make for harmony between the Jews and non-Jews.

The Jews in this community have been accepted in all
social and educational activities without prejudice or
discrimination. The Jews in this community mingle with
the white non-Jews and form a large per cent of their
country clubs, business clubs and civic activities in
general.

The white South will not desegregate without a long
and bitter fight.

In communities such as Greenville, if integration is
had at this time it would mean 60% of the enrollment
of our grammar schools would be negro students. A large

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per cent of these negro children come from homes with no social background or environment, and a large per cent of them are the result of illegitimacy. It would only retard the white Jewish children as well as the white Gentiles to have their children placed under this integration and environment.

Feeling as we do, we respectfully urge that your fine organization not embarrass and injure the Jews of this community and other Southern communities who feel as we do, by having it broadcast that the Jews as a whole are actively working to desegregate the South.

If, in spite of the feelings of the Southern Jews such as we, the organization should continue to attempt to speak for the Jews as a whole, it will ultimately cause a breach in our ranks because we will be forced to publicly express the opinion of the Southern Jew as we know it. We hope this situation may be avoided by Jewish organizations not becoming active in the negro segregation issue.

Sincerely,

HEBREW UNION CONGREGATION
Greenville, Mississippi

Jerome S. Hafter, Chairman

Eugene Raphael

Earl Solomon

Joe Weinberg

SOURCE: Hebrew Union Congregation to Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, 1 May 1956. Hebrew Union Congregation Official Records, Greenville, Mississippi. Permission for use granted by Richard Dattel.

Hebrew Union Congregation

P. O. BOX 212

Greenville, Mississippi

Allen H. Schwartzman, Rabbi

212 MAIN STREET

November 7, 1963

Board of Trustees
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York 21, New York

Gentlemen:

At its monthly meeting on November 4, 1963, the Board of Directors of the Hebrew Union Congregation of Greenville, Mississippi, voted to express its protest upon learning of the arrangements for the banquet program of the forthcoming Biennial Convention.

Our tradition cautions us to aid and protect the welfare of our brethren of the Household of Israel wherever they may live. The selection of a controversial figure as a featured speaker, regardless of his ability and achievements, with its attendant publicity places undue and unnecessary pressure upon our already exposed people in this area of the country. We deem the arrangements for the Biennial program to have been ill-timed and ill-advised, and clearly fraught with anxieties for our membership.

We feel deeply distressed and chagrined that the leadership of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations did not deem it vital, in so delicate a matter, to consult with our Rabbi and lay leadership before arranging this program. We believe that had our leadership been consulted in advance, and our position given a fair hearing, other arrangements might have been made in the Biennial program, and the feeling of distress which has arisen among our members would have been avoided.

Yours truly,

BG:bog

Bernard Goodman, President

cc: Dr. Maurice W. Wisendrath, President, UAHC

Judge Emile Baar, Board of Trustees Chm., UAHC

Rabbi Solomon K. Kaplan, Regional Director, Southwest Council, UAHC

SOURCE: Bernard Goodman, President of Hebrew Union Congregation to the Board of Trustees, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 7 November 1963. Hebrew Union Congregation Official Records, Greenville, Mississippi. Permission for use granted by Richard Dattel.



AN 2052

830 Fifth Avenue New York 21, N. Y. Regent 7-8200

Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, President

November 13, 1963

Mr. Bernard Goodman, President
Hebrew Union Congregation
Post Office Box 212
Greenville, Mississippi

Dear Mr. Goodman:

Thank you very much for your letter of November 7 conveying the results of the meeting of your Board of Directors and the protest about the Biennial Assembly. I have read your letter with great care and am deeply distressed with the anguish that has been caused you. I so regret that the invitation to have Dr. King address our Biennial has created such unhappiness for you.

I want to assure you that every action taken in the various areas of Social Action entails the most careful consideration, the deep and sensitive concern for the difficult position of our fellow Reform Jews in the exposed areas of the South. The many meetings with our southern congregations have created and continue to create that consciousness.

There is much soul-wrestling at the UAHC, much consultation and widespread probing before any action is taken. Our congregants in the South have made clear their position and the dynamics of the situation in the various states, through which there are great variations between states and communities, and the UAHC administration is exceedingly cautious and ever strives to tread that narrow path between inaction and reckless action. I believe it does so admirably.

There are many requests made of us by kindred organizations, church bodies and synagogue groups, Jewish and Christian civil rights organizations as well, and by many individuals to take part in a host of activities or to initiate them. Many of these suggestions are attractive in that they would serve splendidly to advance the ideals to which we are committed, would help reduce or bring attention to discrimination based on color.

It is because of the careful lifting and cautious weighing that many of these are not undertaken. We are frequently criticized for being too sensitive to the requests of our southern congregations, of lagging behind other religious groups, of failing to fulfill the mandate of the majority of our congregants. There is frequently justice in this accusation.

We know that any positive step we take, though these steps be too infrequent, and only the most modest of gestures made, will be castigated sharply by some in the southern congregations.

November 13, 1963

In candor, I contend we ought to be apologizing to the majority of our congregations who expect more from us than the mere participation in the Washington March, the statement entitled "A Call to Racial Justice" and the invitation extended to Dr. King to address the Biennial banquet. Yet even these pitifully inadequate gestures are the recipients of endless, bitter complaint.

We have done too little. We have heeded too much the complaints of those who disagree with our position on integration and, if the truth be told, we are far behind every other religious organization and far behind what our ideals demand.

Our Conservative counterpart, the United Synagogue, is having its Biennial the same week as ours and are also having Dr. King address them. In addition, they are giving him their Solomon Schechter Award, the highest award their movement can bestow upon distinguished leaders in contemporary American life. We have spoken to them repeatedly to discern if they are receiving protests and threats. To their pride and our shame, they are receiving no such response. Last Sunday, Dr. King received the St. Francis Peace Medal from a national organization of 100,000 Roman Catholic clergymen and laymen.

Dr. King has changed the nature of the Negro revolt. He has given it spirituality and dignity. He has impressed upon his people the necessity for a non-violent approach to their revolution. If it were not for Dr. King, we would today be witnessing savagery and brutality from both sides. Many are convinced that this nation is so deeply in his debt because he has saved us from an experience that is horrible even to contemplate. Not only has he saved us from the degradation of a violent or physical confrontation between fellow Americans, he has made certain that his people and all Americans see the striving toward equality by the American Negro as part of the basic religious precepts to which we all pay homage or at least lip service. If we do not uphold his hand, if we do not support his effort, others will take his place who will bring us to calamity.

Dr. King was invited because of the noble sense of religious idealism he represents, because of the high principles he has brought into play. He stands as a mountain among the foothills and to have invited another would have been to undermine his stature and to have given strength to his foes.

Sincerely yours,



Maurice N. Eisendrath

SOURCE: Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath to Bernard Goodman, 13 November 1963, Hebrew Union Congregation Official Records, Greenville, Mississippi. Permission for use granted by Richard Dattel.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you make of these exchanges?
- How do you think the conversation about civil rights has progressed in the Jewish community since these letters were sent?
- Do any of these arguments echo anything you have felt, read or heard in recent months?

DISCUSSION ENTREE: OPTION 3

CREATE YOUR OWN! (AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES)

Have you come across an engaging video, article or piece that you want to use as a prompt for discussion with your guests? Interested in facilitating a conversation without a source? Want to ask your guests to each bring interesting sources that they've come across with them to the dinner and use those to prompt discussion? Go for it!

We recommend creating Guiding Questions beforehand, or asking guests to bring Guiding Questions with them, and then wrapping up your discussion with the Closing Reflections.

Still looking for more inspiration? Check out these additional resources:

Video:

- The Atlantic. "The Enduring Myth of Black Criminality." Narrated by Ta-Nehisi Coates. 10 Sept 2015. Web. <http://theatlantic.com/life/archive/2015/09/black-criminality/424000/>.

Video Description:

In this video, Atlantic writer Ta-Nehisi Coates tracks the association made in the United States today between blackness and criminality over centuries of American history, and makes the provocative argument that the criminal justice system is working as a method of racialized social control.

Articles about Racial Justice:

- Laser, Rachel. "Uncovering My White Privilege on Yom Kippur." The Huffington Post. 29 Sept 2015. Web. <http://huff.to/1V8OC04>.
- Steinlauf, Gil. "Jews in America struggled for decades to become white. Now we must give up whiteness to fight racism." Washington Post. 22 Sept 2015. Web. <http://wapo.st/1j6ILvV>.
- Kolin, Rabbi Stephanie. "I am Jewish and Black Lives Matter," The Huffington Post. 17 July 2015. Web. <http://huff.to/1Gqa4Uz>.
- Newman, Andy. "At Princeton, Woodrow Wilson, a Heralded Alum, Is Recast as an Intolerant One." The New York Times. 22 Nov 2015. Web. <http://nyti.ms/1IDOZn7>.
- Rankine, Claudia. "The Meaning of Serena Williams." The New York Times. 25 Aug 2015. Web. <http://nyti.ms/1NRFOYC>.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." The Atlantic. June 2014. Web. <http://theatlantic.com/life/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/381628/>.

If you do choose this route, please share your resources and customized activities with us - post using @RepairtheWorld @TheRAC #TurntheTables or email us at awaters@rac.org and mlk@weRepair.org.

DESSERT: CLOSING REFLECTIONS

CLOSING THE DISCUSSION

After your entree discussion has concluded, we encourage you and your guests to reflect on this dinner experience and process the information presented in your discussion.

We recommend the Triangle-Square-Circle reflection method, which asks participants to share either:

- **Triangle:** Three points they took away from this discussion
- **Square:** Anything that “squares” with their thinking or anything they agreed with
- **Circle:** Something that’s still circling around in their head

TAKE ACTION

We believe that meaningful and structured dialogue about community issues is the catalyst that leads to action. We hope that after tonight’s conversation you and your guests feel inspired to **TAKE ACTION** and volunteer around issues of racial injustice.

Visit www.weRepair.org, where you will find opportunities happening over MLK Weekend in your area!

And visit www.rac.org/mlk for MLK resources including prayers, discussion guides, informational documents and opportunities to take legislative action.

Thank you for your participation!

Remember to share your experience with us!

Tag and post your photos, stories, or videos using

@RepairtheWorld @TheRAC #TurntheTables