



Ethan Heitner

## Introduction by Leo Ferguson

We gather on Passover to recall a moment of resistance and liberation in the history of our people. The story of Exodus reminds us of the transformative power that our people wield when we confront oppression.

This summer we witnessed the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner at the hands of the police; in the months that followed the #BlackLivesMatter movement blossomed from that stained soil and swept the country. From Ferguson to Staten Island, Black people resisted the discriminatory and abusive policing targeting them. #BlackLivesMatter, a term coined by activists Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors & Opal Tometi, demands that we recognize the full humanity and precious value of every individual Black life — that we cherish and fight for all people of African heritage.

In this spirit, **Jews For Racial & Economic Justice** collaborated with inspiring activists and leaders from around the country to produce this Haggadah supplement. In it you will find additions to the Seder rituals & Haggadah text intended to highlight the role we believe Jews must play in confronting racism and abusive policing. Each piece of the supplement may provoke discussion, reflection or even contention. We hope that this wrestling, thinking and feeling — in the great tradition of our people — will be a powerful part of your Seder and will lead to meaningful action for justice.

*JFREJ does not necessarily endorse every view presented here, but we are deeply proud to help share the diversity of voices and ideas that power this movement. ♦*

*When drinking the four cups and eating the matzah, we lean on our left side to accentuate the fact that we are free people. In ancient times only free people had the luxury of reclining while eating. We ask that this year you consider what it means to recline when so many are not yet free from oppression. This is not a simple question, and so there is no simple answer. In solidarity, you may choose not to recline. Or perhaps we can rest tonight in order to let go of the weight of our fears — our fear of others; of being visible as Jews; of committing to work outside of what is familiar and comfortable — so that we may lean into struggle tomorrow. ♦*

## Karpas by Yehudah Webster

A small piece of onion, parsley, or boiled potato is dipped into saltwater and eaten (after reciting the blessing over vegetables). Dipping the karpas is a sign of luxury and freedom. The saltwater represents the tears of our ancestors in Mitzrayim. **This year may it also represent tears of Black parents and families mourning the loss of their Black youth at the hands of police brutality. ♦**

## Some Information About Discriminatory & Abusive Policing

Here in New York City, “Broken Windows” policing disproportionately targets poor communities of color for low-level offenses. Being arrested or “summonsed” for even minor violations such as riding a bicycle on the sidewalk can have extreme consequences such as loss of scholarships and financial aid, being evicted from public housing, or being fired for missing a day of work. There are other types of abusive policing in NYC such as the broad-based, and unconstitutional surveillance of Muslims. In Ferguson, the U.S. Department of Justice investigation of the local police force discovered what residents already knew — sweeping Civil Rights violations and pervasive racial bias among police. Equally corrosive and abusive police cultures and policies exist in departments across the nation.

### In New York City

- Between January 2004 and June 2012 the police stopped, questioned or frisked 4.4 million people. 94% of these stops uncovered no crime at all. (NY Times; NYCLU)
- Black & Latino New Yorkers made up almost 9 out of 10 stops. (NYCLU)
- In 2011, stops of young black men (ages 14–24) outnumbered the entire population of young black men in New York City. (NYCLU)
- The police patrol our public schools, where Black & Latino children make up 95% of those arrested. (NYCLU)

### In Ferguson, MO, the U.S. Department of Justice found that:

- African Americans experience disparate impact in nearly every aspect of Ferguson’s law enforcement system.
- Despite making up 67% of the population, African Americans accounted for 85% of traffic stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of arrests from 2012 to 2014.
- African Americans have force used against them at disproportionately high rates, accounting for 88% of all cases from 2010 to August 2014 in which an FPD officer reported using force.

### Nationally, police violence and the over-incarceration of people of color resembles a “New Jim Crow.”

- Blacks are only 12 percent of the population and 13 percent of drug users, but they constituted almost a third of those arrested in 2010. (CRF)
- An African American male born in 2001 had a 32% chance of going to jail in his lifetime, while a Latino male has a 17% chance, and a white male only 6%. (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics)
- In the first 6 months of 2012 a Black person was killed by the police or other authorities every 36 hours. (MXGM)
- 46% had no weapon at all at the time. (MXGM)

*How can we say that Black & Brown lives matter when we treat them so carelessly? Imprison, kill and humiliate them with such reckless abandon? As Jews we know what it feels like to be treated like this. This Passover, what will you commit to so that no one else has to experience this kind of discrimination?*

*“Why on this night when we remember the oppression and resistance of Jews should we also think about the lives of people of color?”* **Because many Jews are people of color. Because racism is a Jewish issue. Because our liberation is connected.**

White Ashkenazi Jews have a rich history but are only a part of the Jewish story. Mizrahi & Sephardi Jews; Yemeni Jews; Ethiopian Jews; Jews who trace their heritage to the Dominican Republic, to Cuba & Mexico; to Guyana & Trinidad; descendants of enslaved Africans whose ancestors converted or whose parents intermarried.

Jews of color are diverse, multihued and proud of it — proud of our Jewishness and proud of our Blackness. But though our lives are joyous and full, racism forces us down a narrow, treacherous path. On the one hand we experience the same oppression that afflicts all people of color in America — racism targets us, our family members, and our friends. On the other hand, the very community that we would turn to for belonging and solidarity — our Jewish community — often doesn’t acknowledge our experience.

Jews of color cannot choose to ignore the experiences of people of color everywhere, anymore than we would ignore our Jewishness. We must fully inhabit both communities and we need all Jews to stand with us, forcefully and actively opposing racism and police violence.

But in order to do so, we must pare our past trauma from our present truth: our history of oppression leaves many of us hyper-vigilant and overly preoccupied with safety. As Jews we share a history that is overburdened with tales of violent oppression. Though different Jewish communities have varying experiences, none of us have escaped painful legacies of persecution, including genocide. This past is real, and part of why we gather today is to remember it. *But the past is past.* However seductive harsh policing, surveillance and incarceration may be in the short term, it will never serve us in the end. Not when those tactics brutalize other communities, humiliating and incarcerating our neighbors and perpetuate a status quo that leaves low-income communities of color on the other side of a sea of fear — still trapped; still stranded. The only real way out of the Mitzrayim of our fears is solidarity. Only by forging deep connections and sharing struggle with other communities will we be creating the lasting allies who will walk with us into the promised land of our collective liberation. That is true Jewish freedom — true and lasting safety.

*They cried to Moses, “What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt ... it is better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (14:11-12).*

When Moses led the Jews out of Egypt, it was a moment of great risk and great change. As the passage above shows us, though life under Pharaoh was cruel and crushing, it was also familiar — a known fear. After a century of servitude, freedom. What changed? It was the Jewish people daring to imagine for themselves something greater. Daring to take great risks and face great fears to find liberation. This willingness to stand up for justice is a strength we have found again and again. When the oppression of economic exploitation demanded it, our grandparents found it in the labor movement; when the civil rights movement demanded it, our parents travelled to the South to register voters. Now this moment demands again that we take risks for justice.

What our neighbors in communities of color are asking — what the Jews of color in our own communities need from their fellow Jews — is that we push past the comfortable and move to action. In the streets, in our synagogues and homes, with our voices, our bodies, our money and resources, with our imaginations. In doing so we must center the voices and the leadership of Jews of color and other communities of color, while forming deep partnerships and long-term commitments to fight for lasting change.

Passover is a time of remembrance but also one of renewal — of looking ahead toward the spring and new growth that will sustain us through the seasons to come. Once we spent spring in the desert. It was harsh and difficult but from that journey grew a people who have endured for centuries. What would happen if we took that journey again, not alone in the wilderness but surrounded by friends and allies, leaving no one behind? ♦

*Go Down Moses is a Negro Spiritual, originally sung by enslaved Africans in the American South. It describes the Exodus story and so it has become common for Jews to sing it during the Seder. As we use the beautiful songs of Black people to enrich our Jewish traditions, Evan Traylor asks you to reflect on what it means to sing a song of freedom when so many are not free.*

On this Passover, as we remind ourselves of the preciousness of freedom, let us be reminded that we are not all free. Black people in the United States continue to suffer from oppression. And while Black people are not physically enslaved as during the dark part of our nation's history, they still suffer from education inequality, mass incarceration, police brutality, and other forms of both blatant and subtle racism.

### **Do we all truly know that Black lives matter?**

Just as during the Exodus story, may all of us have the leadership of Moses, the spirit of Miriam, and the undying courage of Nachshon to stand with Black people and ensure that everyone knows and believes that Black lives matter. Just as the Israelites did not turn back from the Red Sea, we must not turn back from the enormous challenges that are wounding and killing Black people in the United States. Mirroring the Israelites crossing the Red Sea with danger at their backs, we too must join hands, face the challenges, and overcome. **Through faith and fellowship, we shall overcome.** ♦

### The Cup of Elijah Why Black Lives Matter to a People for Whom G-d Promised a Holy Place By Graie Barasch-Hagans

*As we open the door for the Prophet Elijah, Graie Barasch-Hagans asks us to love and support the stranger, the beggar and the familial in our struggle for collective liberation, and to recognize that these three peoples are often one and the same.*

As Jews we come together in our most vulnerable moments. We come as community to support our mourners in our synagogues and in our homes. As Black folks we have come to the street, to the courthouse, to the town square to demand justice.

Our demands for justice are a communal act to love and support one another. A communal act to remember those who have been taken from us.

We have no kaddish, no framework of remembrance. We have hashtags, freedom songs, and protest chants.

When we say Black Lives Matter we are calling for the recognition of G-d in us all. We are calling for our skin to be recognized as the skin of family, our tears to be recognized as the tears of mothers, of fathers, of lovers, the tears of G-d.

As Jews we know that we are loved by a G-d that calls us to love our neighbors as we love the stranger. To love G-d as we love the least among us. To pursue justice as we pursue the fulfillment of all commandments. We know that we are people because G-d so chose us through our suffering to be the carriers of the burden.



We are a people centered in loss and justice.

We are a people who know that there is a better world and that it our responsibility, our duty to love and support one another. The stranger, the beggar, and the familial.

For those of us who live our lives through Blackness we cannot separate our duty as Jews from our fears of being strange in a land that though of our birth still does not recognize us fully as present. As Jews who cannot separate from our Blackness we inhabit spaces of silent loss. We struggle to rise as mourners in spaces that call for us to remember our time as slaves in Egypt. To remember that we are not safe as Jews. That are inhabited by the call “Never Again.”

For we are the descendants of slaves with no great escape story. No great memorial to our suffering. No great G-d to intervene on our behalf, to choose us, to form us as a people. And yet for many of us who inhabit both Blackness and Jewishness we feel the deep divide, as the parting of the seas. For if our images of our great escape maintain the dichotomy of light versus dark would the sea fall in on us? Would we be cast aside, swept away in the great tide? Would we be held tight and carried with as much as care as the bread we did not have time to rise? As so many with faces with skin so similar to mine remain in bondage, in isolation, removed from a people still struggling will we return to the voice of “we” in our demand to Let my people go? ♦

## Maggid Dayenu by KB Frazier

*Singing Dayenu is a 1000-year old Passover tradition. The 15-stanza poem thanks G-d for 15 blessings bestowed upon the Jews in the Exodus. Had G-d only parted the seas for us, “It would have been enough” we say for each miracle or divine act, thus humbly appreciating the immensity of the gifts. KB Frazier’s reworking of the poem addresses us, rather than G-d. It calls us to greater action for justice, saying “lo dayenu” (it would not have been enough) in recognition of the work still unfinished.*

1. If we had sparked a human rights revolution that would unite people all over the world and not followed our present day Nachshons as they help us part the sea of white supremacy and institutional racism — Lo Dayenu
2. If we had followed Nachshons like the youth leaders in Ferguson and not heeded the words they spoke from Black Liberation Leader Assata Shakur: *It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains* — Lo Dayenu



Sarah Quinter

3. If we had learned and chanted the words from Assata Shakur and not protested violence by militarized police — Lo Dayenu
4. If we had protested police use of tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper spray and rifles pointed at protesters and forgotten that we are all *b'tselem elohim*, created in G-d's image — Lo Dayenu
5. If we had remembered that we are all created in G-d's image and not affirmed Black Lives Matter — Lo Dayenu
6. If we had chanted and cried out that Black Lives Matter and not remembered Rekia Boyd, Alyanna Jones, Shantel Davis, Yvette Smith and Tyisha Miller, Black women and girls also killed by police — Lo Dayenu
7. If we had marched for those killed, chanting *Hands up Don't shoot* and not recalled the words of Eicha: *Lift of thy hands toward Hashem for the life of the thy young children, that faint for hunger at the head of every street.* — Lo Dayenu
8. If we had recalled the words of Eicha and not called to attention the school to prison pipeline and the mass incarceration of Black and brown people — Lo Dayenu
9. If we had called attention to the “new Jim Crow” system — and did not truly *sh'ma* (listen) — Lo Dayenu
10. If we had truly listened to the stories, pain and triumphs of our brothers and sisters of color without feeling the need to correct, erase or discredit them and did not recognize the Pharaohs of this generation — Lo Dayenu
11. If we had worked to dismantle the reigns of today's Pharaohs and had not joined the new civil rights movement — Lo Dayenu
12. If we had marched, chanted, listened, learned and engaged in this new civil rights movement and not realized that this story is our story, including our people and requiring our full participation — Lo Dayenu
13. If we had concluded that our work is not done, that the story is still being written, that now is still the moment to be involved and that we haven't yet brought our gifts and talents to the Black Lives Matter movement — Lo Dayenu

*While this is not the first instance of state violence against Black people or the first human rights movement, it is indeed OUR time to step up and make a difference. We must work together to progress from Lo Dayenu to Dayenu in the coming years. Ken Yehi Ratzon. ♦*

## After the Maggid When We Imagine Ourselves Allies by Sarah Barasch-Hagans and Graie Barasch-Hagans

*Having now told the story of Jews' Exodus from Mitzrayim we have come to know Miriam, Moses, Pharaoh, Tzipporah and the role each of them played. Sarah Barasch-Hagans & Graie Barasch-Hagans use these roles to help us understand our roles in the fight against oppression — when we are strong allies and when we still struggle to be our best selves.*

### **Author Note:**

*In most discussions of racial justice, interracial families are often made completely invisible. This is ironic, as these families constantly deal in a microcosm with the larger issues of white supremacy and thus have much to teach us. This piece began as a way of addressing the complexities of oppression within interracial families and pushing against how abstract and disconnected most conceptions of “allyship” can feel for white members of interracial families. The language of fighting for family may make more sense for everyone to acknowledge the experiences of an interracial family unit and of a larger multiracial human family.*

*The Exodus story is filled with allies and oppressors, with many of the characters inhabited both roles at different points. The Exodus story, and particularly the story of wandering afterwards, is populated by family members wrestling with what it means to be allied with each other. Since our current struggles can feel like we too are in a desert, let us pause in the desert this Passover to listen for justice, just as the*

*Midrash tells us that entire Jewish family did at Sinai. If everywhere is a desert then the sand we stand is always shifting, and so is our relationship to each other. Let us take a moment to imagine ourselves thus...*

### **Sometimes we are Bat Pharaoh...**

...Pharaoh's daughter, choosing "compassion"<sup>1</sup> without hesitation, pulling the baby out of the river and giving him a home. But when we pull him from the river, he is taken from his people and forced to pretend to be someone else in order to survive. And we know that he is family and **we love him as our son, but we ask impossible things of him**. We ask him to pass for Egyptian, we cut him off from his heritage in the hopes of keeping him safe. We do not recognize the futility, that safety is always an illusion. We do not use our proximity to power to try to change the situation for other babies like him. We can sleep at night because **we tell ourselves we are good people living in a cruel system**, but we do not admit that we could change things if only we would convince our synagogue to support the protests, or to at least stop hiring police officers to protect High Holiday services without questioning whether they make all of our community feel safe.

### **Sometimes we are Moses...**

...conditionally white with Cossack eyes and a quick sunburn, passing but keeping a suitcase by the door just in case. Feeling mostly safe in the palace walls, guilty but not knowing why, until one day everything changes. Until one day we see the Egyptian striking the Israelite and know he is hurting our family—**and this time we do not run away**. We know that Moses killed the taskmaster, but we do not do not strike anyone, knowing that violence will not lead to greater justice for our families because violence by those of us who 'pass' would be met with greater violence and retaliation against those who cannot hide behind conditional whiteness. So sometimes we are standing next to our our Black husband at the protest, and we are both chanting peacefully but the policeman strikes him and all we can do is choose not to run away, to stand firmly with our hands raised so that we both get hit. **Because family means if you hit him then you hit me**.

### **Sometimes we are Miriam...**

...hoping our brother Moses survives the river, knowing danger and feeling unsafe in our Jewish skin, knowing what it means to be hated because of who we are. And then we are Miriam who, given time, a few chapters later mocks Moses' Black wife Tzipporah.<sup>2</sup> **She confounds us because she is us**, Ashkenazim with conditional whiteness and generations distanced from legal discrimination, not seeing the contradictions in our own character. We are white-skinned Jews celebrating Fifty Years of Freedom Summer and putting on commemorative panels but escorting out anyone who yells #BlackLivesMatter. Or, acknowledging Tzipporah but refusing to defend her interracial, interfaith family when Jewish talking heads warn that families like hers are the end of Judaism. **We are descendants of slaves who do not yell back** that Moses had a Black wife and Black children and that #BlackLivesMatter to our people whether or not we acknowledge it.

### **Sometimes we are Tzipporah...**

...fully capable of defending ourselves but **in need of a few more allies**. Ready to be an ally when it means leaving our family, circumcising our children, and wandering in the desert for decades. And some of us are still Tzipporah. Marveling at how quickly you forget this when our children are killed by the police. Wondering if you will claim us as family when the news paints our children as deserving of their deaths. We wonder why we stand in community to say Kaddish for those we've lost and stand on street corners shouting for justice for those who have been stolen from us. **We wonder why our many parts cannot become whole and why our children cannot be a blessing**. Picking up a sign because we have no choice, hoping to see you at the protests even though you do.

### **Sometimes something miraculous happens...**

...an event out of time, an act of God who comes with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and leads us out of Egypt. And in the desert we become a people, shedding the divisions and mentality of slavery so that we become whole—none of us palace people, all of us desert people. **Wandering together towards wholeness**. So that Miriam, a prophet who is human, can choose to change. When she is struck with illness as punishment for her slander of Tzipporah, she can heal and choose new words. And her healing prayer spoken by her brother Moses—*El Na Refa Na La*—becomes liturgy that

<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>

Exodus 2:6  
Numbers 12:1



Raul Ayala

can inspire us to overcome the disease of our own racism. We can choose to challenge the narrative, write an editorial or interrupt a General Assembly, **tell the pundits that we have always been an *Erev Rav, a mixed multitude***<sup>1</sup> and if you do not embrace all of our family, then you cannot love any of us. We can choose to pick up our sign and join them in the street, to face the tear gas and the rubber bullets because they are killing our family.

**Sometimes, we are all in the street, and the street becomes Sinai...**

...but only if everyone shows up, Moses and Miriam and Bat Pharaoh and Tzipporah and all the rest, wrestling with the commandments and trying to hear God. Maybe we are Tzipporah and Bat Pharaoh meeting at a Mother's March. And maybe we talk about being there because **we are both mothers and Mike Brown could have been our son**. Or maybe we talk about having ensured the survival of the Jewish people, yet isn't it ironic that now our community will not march for anyone that looks like us? Or maybe we have nothing to talk about, but **a look passes between us and God is there**.

*And maybe our imagining their conversation is a holy act that we desperately need. Because sometimes, if we imagine the rally as Sinai then we listen for God, and when we do we get **one step further through the desert and one step closer to redemption.*** ♦

1 Exodus 12:38



**Evan Traylor** is a proud Jew of color and a student at the University of Kansas. He is a past president of NFTY and serves on the Union for Reform Judaism Board of Trustees. **Sarah Barasch-Hagans** is a white Ashkenazi Jewish queer woman from St. Louis in a multiracial family and a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia. **Graie Barasch-Hagans** is a queer trans Black Jewish agitator, St. Louis born & raised. **KB Frazier** is a Black Trans Jew who lives 10 minutes away from Ferguson, MO and has been on the frontlines of this human rights movement since Aug 10, 2014. **Yehudah Webster** is JFREJ Grace Paley Organizing Fellow, a Jew of color, a graduate of a joint program with Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary, and is now currently working with Jewish youth as the METNY USY & Kadima Program Associate. **Leo Ferguson** is a Jew of color and the Leadership Development & Communications Organizer at JFREJ. **Ethan Heitner** is a freelance illustrator and cartoonist living and working in NYC. **Sarah Quinter** is an artist, writer, educator and organizer born and raised in NYC. **Raul Ayala** is a Visual Artist and Educator focusing on themes related to freedom, immigration, and urban-rural politics.

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*Visit [BlackLivesMatterOnPassover.com](http://BlackLivesMatterOnPassover.com) and [www.jfrej.org](http://www.jfrej.org) for more information.*



#### **About Jews For Racial & Economic Justice**

JFREJ pursues racial and economic justice in New York City by advancing systemic changes that result in concrete improvements in peoples daily lives. We engage individual Jews, key Jewish institutions, and key Jewish community leaders in the fight for racial and economic justice in partnership with Jewish and allied people of color, low-income and immigrant communities.