

EXPOSING WHITE SUPREMACY IN NEW JERSEY

Themes from community listening sessions
on white supremacy, domestic threats,
and extremism.

New Jersey Office of the Attorney General
Division on Civil Rights | June 2023



Letter from Division on Civil Rights Director Sundeeep Iyer

For our state to address white supremacy, we need to start from a common understanding. What is white supremacy? How does it affect us? How does it affect our friends and neighbors? And what role can each of us play in dismantling it?

This report seeks to answer those questions. It takes an honest and painful look at the state of white supremacy in New Jersey and the profound impact it has on our community and country.

That inquiry remains as timely as ever. The involvement of white supremacist violent extremists in the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol serves as a powerful reminder of the threat white supremacists pose. Unfortunately, that threat has not abated in recent years. In May 2022, for instance, our nation was again shaken by white supremacist violence when ten Black people at a Buffalo grocery store were murdered by a white gunman who drove some 200 miles to terrorize a predominantly Black community. And as the number of bias incidents continues to rise in New Jersey and nationally, communities across the state and the country continue to witness and experience acts of white supremacist extremism far too regularly.

This report draws from the accounts of community members and experts to expose the traumatic impact that expressions of white supremacy have had on targeted communities, and especially on our young people. It analyzes the strategies white supremacists have used to normalize and mainstream hateful ideologies and inspire people to promote extremist causes. It documents how some white supremacists have engaged in what the FBI has recognized is a decades-long strategy to infiltrate our institutions of public trust, including positions in government and law enforcement, and attempt to misuse their authority to harass, assault, incarcerate, and disenfranchise Black people and other people of color. It outlines the ways in which white supremacist violent extremists and adjacent extremist groups recruit white people, especially young white people. It highlights the critical importance of white people partnering with communities of color to counter, disrupt, and dismantle white supremacy. And it empowers each and every member of our community with best practices to use to counter white supremacy in our day-to-day lives and protect ourselves, our families, and everyone around us from white supremacist radicalization.

This report would not have been possible, first and foremost, without the incredible bravery, candor, and vulnerability of the students and community members who came forward to share their experiences with the Division on Civil Rights (DCR). They sacrificed their time to join us at listening sessions, speaking poignantly and passionately about the white supremacist discrimination, harassment, and violence they have endured. Ultimately, they put faith in our office that we would treat responsibly the traumatic stories they so courageously shared, and that we would follow through with action. We hope that this report is the first step in demonstrating



that our office is serious about dismantling white supremacy in New Jersey.

This report would not have been possible without the twelve experts and three student panelists who dedicated their time to speaking with us about white supremacist extremism, recruitment, radicalization, and the mental health implications of white supremacy. We would like to extend a sincere thank you to:

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Executive Summary

In 2020, New Jersey's Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness and the United States Department of Homeland Security confirmed what many members of our community already knew: White supremacist violent extremists are among the most “persistent,” “hostile,” and “lethal” threats to our State and our Nation. This report seeks to outline that threat, highlights the severe human cost of white supremacy, and calls upon all New Jersey residents to stand united against hate, actively work to dismantle white supremacy, and to hold ourselves, each other, and our institutions accountable for doing the same.

White supremacy encompasses the full spectrum of bias-based behavior – including biased attitudes, acts of bias, and systemic discrimination – that results from a belief in the superiority of white people. White supremacist violent extremism is the willingness to threaten or engage in white supremacy-motivated physical violence and crime. Both white supremacy and white supremacist violent extremism inflict trauma on the many communities they target. White supremacists target not only the Black community, but all communities of color. They target not only the Jewish community, but all faith communities. And they target community members not only based on their race or faith, but also based on their gender and sexuality.

More than 200 community members and experts participated in the listening sessions that formed the foundation of this report. Their accounts bore witness to the inescapable reach of white supremacy and the widespread trauma it inflicts. Five key themes emerged from the presentations and testimonials participants shared at the listening sessions:

First, community members’ expressions of white supremacy inflict widespread trauma on communities that are targeted by white supremacy, and especially on young people. Community members regularly subject Black people, Jewish people, and other groups to expressions of white supremacy. This exposure to white supremacy is deeply traumatic, but white community members too often dismiss or minimize the experiences of those who are targeted by white supremacy, encouraging targets to treat it as a joke, or ignoring targets’ experiences completely.

Second, through a deliberate strategy to normalize and mainstream white supremacist ideologies, extremists influence community members to promote white supremacist causes. White supremacist violent extremists have pursued a deliberate, decades-long strategy to blend into mainstream society and promote fear and false narratives to normalize and uphold white supremacy, and they are increasingly effective at leveraging social media and other online forums to maximize their impact. Mainstream white supremacist talking points, circulated widely in both traditional and social media, have enlisted community members to resist implementation of anti-bias education.

Third, some white supremacist violent extremists have pursued a deliberate strategy to infiltrate positions of authority in government and law enforcement and (mis)use their authority to harass, assault, incarcerate, and disenfranchise Black people and other people of color. As the FBI has explained, the infiltration tactics used by some white supremacists have been leveraged to seek positions of power in all levels of government, from law

enforcement agencies and state legislatures to executive offices and local school boards.

Fourth, white supremacist violent extremists and adjacent extremist groups recruit white people – especially young white people – by leveraging their insecurities to inspire them to target others. This recruitment frequently occurs online, via multiplayer games, online message boards, social media, and other internet forums, where white supremacists use memes and “jokes” that are racist, sexist, anti-LGBTQIA+, antisemitic, and otherwise hateful to normalize bigotry. Young white people who have experienced trauma are particularly vulnerable to such recruitment. Trauma does not excuse participation in white supremacy. Yet it is so often a factor in why young white people turn to white supremacist violent extremism.

Fifth, it is critical for white people to partner with communities of color and other targets of white supremacists to counter white supremacy. White community members must work closely with community members who have been targeted by white supremacy to dismantle white supremacy.

Finally, based on the presentations and testimonials of experts and community members at the listening sessions, the report identifies a set of best practices for dismantling white supremacy:

1. Listen to and learn from the experiences of those targeted by white supremacy – especially people of color.
2. Don’t contribute to normalizing or mainstreaming hate – in-person or online.
3. Proactively discuss race and racism with youth.
4. Educate youth on how to avoid recruitment.
5. Recognize the risk for and signs of radicalization, and intervene early if you see them.
6. Equip youth and adults with resources and support systems for coping with and combatting white supremacy.

These best practices are crucial so that community members can protect themselves, their children, and their communities from the damage white supremacy inflicts.

Introduction

The cost to our community of allowing white supremacy and white supremacist violent extremism to go unchecked is extraordinarily high. Too many members of our community are already acutely aware of that cost. At the same time, however, too many members of our community do not realize the extent or urgency of the threat. This report seeks to illuminate the full impact of white supremacy and white supremacist violent extremism, and calls upon each and every member of our community to join the effort to combat it.

In February 2020, New Jersey’s Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP) issued its “2020 Terrorism Threat Assessment.”¹ In it, then-Director Jared Maples wrote:

*Homeland security and law enforcement professionals at all levels have taken notice of the rise in activity from white supremacist extremists. New Jersey is committed to protecting the diversity of culture and faith that shapes our great State. For that reason, **NJOHSP increased the threat posed by white supremacist extremists from moderate to high in 2020, joining homegrown violent extremists as the most persistent hostile actors in New Jersey.***

The United States Department of Homeland Security agreed with this assessment. In October 2020, the United States Department of Homeland Security issued its “Homeland Threat Assessment,” which reached a similar conclusion:

*Among DVEs [Domestic Violent Extremists], racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists—specifically white supremacist extremists (WSEs)—will remain **the most persistent and lethal threat** in the Homeland. . . .*

*2019 was **the most lethal year for domestic violent extremism** in the United States since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. . . . Among DVE actors, WSEs conducted half of all lethal attacks (8 of 16), resulting in the majority of deaths (39 of 48).²*

WSEs have demonstrated longstanding intent to target racial and religious minorities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, politicians, and those they believe promote multi-culturalism and globalization at the expense of the WSE identity. Since 2018, they have conducted more lethal attacks in the United States than any other DVE movement.³

Those threats have not diminished in recent years. The OHSP’s “2022 Terrorism Threat Assessment” continued to rate the threat presented by white supremacist violent extremists as “high,” noting that white supremacist violent extremists are likely to “produce personal manifestos, collect extremist literature and stockpile weapons while aspiring to conduct lone offender attacks.”⁴ And according to an OHSP review of recent data, U.S.-based white supremacist violent extremists “conducted at least 28 attacks” across the United States “over the last five years, resulting in 52 deaths and 79 injuries.”⁵

The threat posed by white supremacist extremism is especially alarming in light of the tactics some white supremacist extremists have used across the country. As the FBI and former white supremacist violent extremists themselves have explained,⁶ white supremacist violent extremists have sought for decades to infiltrate our public institutions to maximize their ability to inflict harm on Black people, immigrants, Jewish people, Muslim people, Asian people, Latinx/e people,⁷ people of other non-white communities, and LGBTQIA+ people at the individual and systemic level. They have also sought to execute a deliberate strategy to infect our public discussions – on topics ranging from politics to public health to education to television and media – with white supremacist extremist viewpoints.

The strategies used by white supremacist extremists and the threats they pose underscore the urgency of the findings and recommendations of New Jersey’s Interagency Task Force to Combat Youth Bias in its October 2020 report. In stark contrast to more recent calls around the country to ban anti-racist education, the task force called on New Jersey to dispel the notion that discussing white supremacy and racism is taboo, to commit to addressing these issues with our young people from an early age, and to equip parents and educators with the information they need to feel confident having these conversations.

To equip parents, educators, and other community members to discuss the dangers of white supremacy with our State’s young people, the report called on DCR, the Office of Homeland Security & Preparedness, and the Department of Education to create resource guides to provide information to parents and educators on “extremist trends and signs of radicalization” and to “educate parents on how to talk to their children about online hate group recruitment tactics, how to avoid viewing, posting, and proliferating content that promotes bias, stereotypes, or hate, and how to recognize the difference between real and fake news online.”⁸

Informed by the recent homeland security analyses discussed above – and after the onset of a public health crisis that exposed stark racial inequities, global protests against racialized policing and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and a national increase in white supremacist violent extremism – the Department of Law and Public Safety sought to hear both from experts and from members of the New Jersey community at-large about the impact of white supremacist violent extremism on New Jersey.

On June 3, 2021, New Jersey’s Office of the Attorney General and Office of Homeland Security & Preparedness, together with the Division of Criminal Justice, Division on Civil Rights, and Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, hosted a virtual presentation titled “An Overview of Extremism in New Jersey: Protecting NJ Communities from Domestic Threats.”

Following that presentation, DCR, together with the Office of the Attorney General, hosted two virtual listening sessions on “White Supremacy, Domestic Threats, and Youth Extremism,” one on June 9, 2021,⁹ and a second on July 14, 2021.¹⁰

At the listening sessions, two former violent white supremacists shared honest and deeply unsettling accounts of their experience being recruited by violent white supremacist organizations and their time participating in and leading those organizations. Black, Latinx/e, Asian, Jewish, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ students, ranging from middle school to college-aged, shared powerful

testimonials not only of violent and frightening experiences of being attacked by white supremacists in their communities, but also of the traumatic regularity with which white supremacy invades their school life, their home life, and their friendships. Mental health experts emphasized the role that all forms of white supremacy play in creating an environment of toxic stress, and the importance of trauma-informed care for the people and communities that white supremacists victimize. And experts on extremist organizations shared information about extremist ideologies, recruitment tactics, and strategies to inflict harm.

Collectively, 218 community members participated in the two listening sessions, several community members submitted written comments, and more than sixteen experts gave presentations across all three events.

Their accounts gave voice to the profound impact of white supremacy on our community. The impact of white supremacy on our Black, Latinx/e, Asian, Jewish, LGBTQIA+, and immigrant neighbors is both deeply traumatic, and, at least until recently, largely invisible to many white residents and others outside of targeted communities until it erupts into violence.

Following these listening sessions, the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General hosted an in-person “Summit on Combatting Bias, Hate, and Violence” on June 21, 2022, that drew together nearly 200 government leaders, stakeholders, and community members to discuss the challenges posed by bias, hate, and white supremacy, and the opportunities for government leaders to work with community members to reduce the incidence of bias and hate.

This report, which draws on the accounts of white supremacy, hate, and bias shared at these listening sessions, is intended to serve as an in-depth resource for parents, educators, and community members, and an urgent call to action for state and local institutions – from public health agencies to law enforcement agencies to educational institutions. It also serves as an important resource for law enforcement agencies as they implement the State’s new police licensing legislation, which was signed by Governor Murphy in July 2022 and authorizes the Police Training Commission (PTC) to impose an adverse license action, including revocation or denial of a police license, to individuals who are active members of a group that advocates for the violent overthrow of the government or engages in violence against, hatred, or bias towards people or groups based on classes protected by the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD).¹¹

Part I of this report defines white supremacy and white supremacist violent extremism. Part II outlines themes presented in the listening sessions. Part III walks through some of the best practices for dismantling white supremacy that came out of the listening sessions.

WHAT IS WHITE SUPREMACY AND WHITE SUPREMACIST VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

Defining White Supremacy and White Supremacist Violent Extremism

It is important to clearly define “white supremacy” and “white supremacist extremism” at the outset. When we think about “white supremacy,” many envision white-robed Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members, swastika-clad Neo-Nazis, and other white supremacist extremists who have engaged in murder, violence, and intimidation.

Some may think of the young Neo-Nazi who walked into the Charleston, South Carolina Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015, shooting and killing nine Black churchgoers.¹²

Some may think of the 2017 “Unite the Right” Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where white supremacist extremists marched for two days with tiki torches, weapons, and American and Nazi flags, chanting “You [people of color] will not replace us”¹³ and “Jews will not replace us.” On the second day of the rally, one of the Neo-Nazis murdered Heather Heyer and injured 35 others when he drove his Dodge Challenger through a peaceful crowd of counter-protesters.¹⁴

Some may think of the 2018 white supremacist attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where the gunman yelled “All Jews must die” before killing 11 and injuring 6 congregants.¹⁵

Some may think about the white nationalist who posted a “manifesto” on the online message board 8chan decrying a “Hispanic invasion,” and shot and killed 23 people and injured more than 20 others at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas in 2019.¹⁶

Some may think of the Atlanta spa killings, when a gunman went on a shooting spree targeting three local Asian spas, killing eight people, six of whom were Asian women.¹⁷

Some may think of the white supremacist massacre in Buffalo in 2022, in which ten Black people



were killed by a white gunman who intentionally targeted a predominantly Black community.¹⁸

And many will think of the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol building, and the images of insurrectionists – broadcast on both the day of the insurrection and in the January 6th Select Committee’s hearings investigating the insurrection – brutally attacking Capitol police, flying the Confederate flag, flashing “white power” symbols in the Capitol Rotunda, and sporting t-shirts emblazoned with the words “Camp Auschwitz” and “6 million was not enough.”¹⁹

The “white supremacist extremists” involved in each of those attacks support and uphold white supremacy. But the term “white supremacy” itself refers to something broader than “white supremacist extremism.”

“White supremacy” refers both to a belief in the superiority of white people and “[s]ystems that uphold the dominant status of white people over all other people.”²⁰ This encompasses not only a belief in the innate or genetic superiority of white people, but a belief that “the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to [p]eople of [c]olor and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions.”²¹ As Mary McCord, Executive Director of Georgetown’s Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, explained: “We know that institutions of our American culture have been built on notions of white supremacy. . . . [T]hat means our criminal justice system, that means other institutions like our financial institutions, our educational institutions, our housing institutions, there’s a structural racism that was built into the way this country formed.”²² In other words, “white supremacy” describes more than acts of physical violence. Rather, it is manifested across the full spectrum of bias-based behavior – including biased attitudes, acts of bias, and systemic discrimination.²³

Students who spoke at the listening sessions echoed this definition of white supremacy. One student explained: “To me, white supremacy [is] considering whiteness as the norm because it’s so ingrained in their society and because there’s such a history of white superiority and anything that is not white being inferior because it has such a deep-rooted history in our society. White supremacy is . . . perceiving whiteness as the norm and everything that deviates from that is not normal.”²⁴ Another student defined white supremacy as “a belief that . . . white people should be dominant in society and should make most of the decisions. I’ve definitely experienced it in my hometown, not like outright them saying that white people are the superior race, but how they act towards me[.]”²⁵

“White supremacist violent extremists,” on the other hand, not only “believe in the inherent superiority of the white race,” but also “seek to establish dominance over non-whites through [physical] violence and other criminal activity.”²⁶ For purposes of this report, DCR defines “white supremacist violent extremism” as the willingness to threaten or engage in white supremacy-motivated physical violence and crime.²⁷

The Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) Pyramid of Hate helps to illustrate why any discussion of white supremacist extremism, and any authentic attempt to combat it, must begin with an honest discussion of white supremacy.

The bias-motivated violence of white supremacist extremists is built upon the acceptance of white



supremacist attitudes, acts of bias, and systemic discrimination. Applying ADL’s Pyramid of Hate to white supremacy specifically, “if people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels [of white supremacy] as being acceptable or ‘normal,’ it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted.”²⁸

Former violent white supremacist extremist Shannon Foley Martinez spoke powerfully about the importance of addressing the full scope of white supremacy:

*I worry about when very bad things happen. . . . something like [the] Tree of Life shooting²⁹ or Dylan Roof³⁰ or something like that that our propensity, . . . particularly as white Americans is to look at that and just be like, look at that bad white supremacy out there that is so awful. . . . [T]hat is so terrible. And **we externalize white supremacy out onto its most violent and most overt forms. And then as white Americans that allows us to externalize white supremacy rather than turning inward** to have to grapple with how we wear our white skin in this nation and how we, our relationship is with white supremacy, how we benefit from it, how we perpetuate it . . . and what our responsibility is in terms of dismantling it.³¹*

The victims of white supremacist violent extremism are often tragically obvious. But both the former white supremacists themselves and the mental health experts who spoke at the listening sessions emphasized that murder and physical violence are not the only impact of white supremacy. One mental health expert who listened extensively to the young people who spoke at

the listening sessions explained the impact their chronic experiences with white supremacy had on their mental health:

*[R]acism and systemic oppression are toxic stressors that lead to adverse long-term health and [mental health] concerns. . . . It is evident that **some if not all the young people** who participated in the listening session **are suffering from some form of anxiety** due to exposure [to] toxic stress at school and within their communities.³²*

It is impossible to address white supremacist violent extremism without dismantling the everyday white supremacy that supports it. And it is impossible to acknowledge the full trauma wrought by white supremacist violent extremism without also addressing the trauma inflicted by everyday acts of white supremacy. This report therefore addresses both, using the terms “white supremacy” and “white supremacist violent extremism” intentionally, as defined above, throughout.

White Supremacist Violent Extremist Categories, Ideologies, and Targeted Communities

It is also helpful, at the outset, to set a basic foundation for the various ideologies that fall under the umbrella of white supremacist violent extremism, and to understand the communities that white supremacists target. According to ADL, the white supremacist violent extremist movement encompasses a number of subcategories, including the Alt-Right, Neo-Nazis, Racist Skinheads, so-called “traditional white supremacists” (like the KKK, League of the South, and others), white nationalists, and white separatists.³³ These groups all adhere to white supremacist ideology. Many also believe in a conspiracy theory, known as “white genocide” or “the great replacement,” “that the white race is ‘dying’ due to growing non-white populations and ‘forced assimilation,’ all of which are deliberately engineered and controlled by a Jewish conspiracy to destroy the white race.”³⁴

As a result of these theories, white supremacist violent extremist ideology targets a number of different communities. Oren Segal, Vice President of the ADL’s Center on Extremism, elaborated on the relationship between white supremacist extremist ideology and its targets: “To [white supremacist extremists], the Jews are responsible for all of these pernicious ideas: multiculturalism, feminism, diversity, inclusion. That’s the connection between anti-Semitism, anti-Blackness, anti-Latinx, etc.” White supremacist narratives, like the racist and antisemitic conspiracy theory known as the “great replacement,” fuel nativist and anti-immigrant sentiments that demonize all non-white communities, promoting not only anti-Black hatred, but anti-Latinx/e, anti-Asian, and anti-Muslim hatred as well.³⁵

Mary McCord, Executive Director of Georgetown’s Institute for Constitutional Advocacy, affirmed that white supremacist violent extremists have engaged in terrorist attacks against a wide array of targeted communities:

We’ve seen multiple different types of violent attacks based on . . . white supremacist extremism. . . . [S]ome have been anti-Black, anti-Latino, antisemitic or anti-Jewish. We’ve seen attacks against LBGTQ members of our communities

*and against people of all different other faiths and races. And when that attack is based on ideology, that is terrorism.*³⁶

Indeed, while white supremacy frequently targets communities based on race, white supremacy also often encompasses discriminatory views about gender and sexuality. The racist and antisemitic conspiracy theory termed the “great replacement,” for example, has also associated LGBTQIA+ communities and efforts to protect them with an alleged conspiracy to “replace” the white population with Black and Brown people by encouraging lower white birthrates.³⁷ And so it is critical to recognize how the recent spike in white supremacist activity targeting the LGBTQIA+ community³⁸ serves to normalize hatred and violence against the LGBTQIA+ community – including the November 2022 mass shooting in which a white gunman murdered five people and injured dozens of others at Club Q, an LGBTQIA+ nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on the eve of the Transgender Day of Remembrance.³⁹

This report therefore uses the phrase “targeted communities” when referring broadly to all communities targeted by white supremacist violent extremism, and refers to more specific targeted communities by name where appropriate.

THEMES PRESENTED IN THE LISTENING SESSIONS

More than 200 community members and experts participated in DCR's two virtual listening sessions. This section discusses the themes that emerged from the presentations, testimonials, and experiences they shared.

Their accounts bore witness to the inescapable reach of white supremacy and the widespread trauma it inflicts. And their accounts exposed the alarming degree to which white supremacist extremists have been allowed to infiltrate our institutions and infect our public dialogues with white supremacist extremist narratives. From their presentations, testimonials, and experiences, five key themes emerged:

1. Community Members' Everyday Expressions of White Supremacy Inflict Widespread Trauma on Communities Targeted by White Supremacy, Particularly on Young People.
2. Through a Deliberate Strategy to Normalize and Mainstream White Supremacist Ideologies, Extremists Influence Community Members to Promote White Supremacist Causes.
3. Some White Supremacist Violent Extremists Have Pursued a Deliberate Strategy to Infiltrate Government Institutions and (Mis)Use Their Authority to Harass, Assault, Incarcerate, and Disenfranchise Black People and Other People of Color.
4. White Supremacist Violent Extremists and Adjacent Extremist Groups Recruit White People – Especially Young White People – by Leveraging Their Insecurities to Inspire Them to Target Others.
5. “Dismantling White Supremacy Is Not on Black People”: The Importance of Partnering with Communities of Color to Counter White Supremacy.

This part discusses each of these themes.

1. Community Members' Everyday Expressions of White Supremacy Inflict Widespread Trauma on Communities Targeted by White Supremacy, Particularly on Young People.

Community Members Regularly Subject Black People, Jewish People, and Other Marginalized Groups to Expressions of White Supremacy.

Every young person who spoke at a listening session said they had experienced white supremacy in some form. As one student put it, “I feel like in everyday life, it’s just hard, not for white supremacy to somehow rear its ugly head . . . I remember going to private school when I was younger and . . . someone just come [sic] up to me and be like, ‘. . . [Y]ou know you’re a n*****, right?’”⁴⁰ Another student shared an experience from their high school: “[T]here was a student who posted a series of TikTok videos that were really derogatory and targeted students of color, specifically African American students . . . [O]ne referr[ed] to African American women as objects to be sold at an auction, and the other compar[ed] African American men to apes.”⁴¹ Yet another student shared an experience from middle school: “I was sitting in a seat that a student was sitting in . . . [the] day before, and I was told that I had no rights . . . , like Rosa Parks, and he proceeded to call me the N-word and told me to move to the back of the classroom.”⁴² And a college student recounted

“Being a woman, being Black, [you] just always feel like you have to prove yourself. That I do know this material, I am good enough, I do get good grades. . .”

a time he overheard a drunk group of students walk past him saying, “oh, pieces of s***”: “[J]ust kind of, you know, laughing, I said, ‘Pieces of s***?’ . . . [A]nd . . . say, ‘yeah, you Jewish pieces of s***.’ [A]nd you know, . . . they come in and actually it was, it was very surreal where they just come in and just start, you know, they, . . . punched me and my brother.”⁴³

Students’ experiences were not limited to white supremacist comments or actions by their peers. One student recounted her experience with a biology professor in college. She was assigned to tutor for his class. But even though she had previously received an “A” in the professor’s class, he did not believe she was the tutor when she showed up.⁴⁴ She explained the accumulated toll those kinds of experiences take: “Being a woman, being Black, [you] just always feel like you have to prove yourself. That I do know this material, I am good enough, I do get good grades. . . I feel like a lot of people, white people to be specific, don’t have to deal with that constant antagonization [sic] of feeling like, ‘[T]he person . . . that’s teaching me doesn’t think that I’m good enough to learn from them.’”⁴⁵ An advocate for another student shared that the student, who is non-verbal and autistic, “was kicked in his back, literally kicked in his back by the bus driver, fell to his face, got a scar, . . . At that same time, he was called the N-word.”⁴⁶

Nor were students' experiences limited to school. Several students recounted being harassed or attacked by white individuals in their community. A Black student shared how, at a pool party to celebrate his friend's birthday, a kid known for making offensive "jokes" told a "joke" that perpetuated a Black stereotype. He attempted to avoid the kid for the rest of the party, "but he kept following me for a long portion of the party and . . . continued with more offensive remarks including about Black Lives Matter."⁴⁷ An immigrant student from India shared one of his first memories in the United States, which happened when he was only four years old:

*[M]y mom and I were visiting [my dad's office campus] and a couple with actually a young child, . . . chased us around campus yelling, 'Go back to your country,' and threw . . . a couple of water bottles at us this entire time. And my parents were extremely afraid after that incident. . . . So one of my first few memories of even being in this country [was] rooted in open displays of systemic racism and white supremacy . . .*⁴⁸

Another immigrant student, from the Dominican Republic, recounted being attacked by a community member at the grocery store as a young teen:

*I was . . . with my grandmother and she doesn't speak English. She only speaks Spanish. So I was conversing with her and we're suddenly approached by a woman . . . who proceeded to kind of yell hateful rhetoric at us [S]he was saying things like, 'Go back to your country.' Like '[T]his is America, speak English, people like you are . . . what's ruining America.' . . . [A]t the time I didn't really know how to react. I couldn't bring myself to tell my grandma, like she's attacking us for partaking in our culture.*⁴⁹

Adult community members also reported exposure to white supremacy. One parent shared her experience when naming her children:

*I remember as a Black woman, when I was naming my own children, I was very conscious of, 'I need to give them names that are powerful, that have meaning, but that are not so –my family's from the Caribbean – that aren't Caribbean, that aren't, um, ethnic.' . . . I was going to choose a name that . . . would not be held against them, . . . [so] they would be, measured on their qualifications, their education and their experience.*⁵⁰

She recalled how that choice was later validated when she learned that the HR director at her job, a white woman, "was unconsciously weeding out people whose names were ethnic."⁵¹ Another parent implored institutions to "[a]ttach as much value to Black fear as white fear within state agencies," offering an example of how the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJISAA) failed to act when she expressed fear for her Black son, but responded with concrete action in response to a situation involving parents of white children:

When my son had to compete in wrestling in high school (HS) at the district level at Phillipsburg [High School], I was frightened for his (and our) safety if he secured the championship title. This was as a result of an incident that

occurred a few years earlier with the Phillipsburg wrestling program, in which a number of wrestlers posed in a photo with a Black doll being lynched. I brought my concerns forward . . . to the [NJISAA] as a parent. No changes resulted . . . and my son competed in Phillipsburg. . . . There were no accommodations made when I expressed my fear for my son, but the [NJISAA] did change the location from Paterson to Clifton when Clifton parents expressed fear due to an increase in local violence in Paterson. As a result some Paterson students had to walk home through the streets, deemed dangerous by Clifton parents, at a later time so [that] Clifton students didn't have to drive through the streets at all. This is a clear demonstration on how an agency of the state values white fear over Black fear.⁵²

Bias incident reporting and news accounts from around New Jersey provide countless other examples of marginalized community members being subjected to white supremacy.⁵³ For example, the “2020 Bias Incident Report,” published by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, and New Jersey State Police, documented several incidents, including one in April 2020 in which “an Asian woman walking near a park was allegedly approached by eight young men and told she had “coronavirus eyes” and that she must have the coronavirus because she is Asian. She was then struck in the back of the neck with an unknown object, possibly a fist.”⁵⁴ Another high-profile incident in 2021 involved a Muslim student whose teacher responded to his request for more time on his homework by saying, “We don’t negotiate with terrorists.”⁵⁵ And in June 2022, according to the ADL, “individuals associated with the white supremacist group White Lives Matter New Jersey” protested outside a Pride celebration, with one man displaying a sign that read “Hands off kids.”⁵⁶ As this report will explain in greater detail, each of these incidents is rooted in narratives that white supremacists have leveraged and sought to push out into the American mainstream.⁵⁷



Exposure to White Supremacy Is Traumatic, But White Community Members Too Often Dismiss or Minimize the Experiences of Those Targeted by White Supremacy

During the listening sessions, it became clear that when Black students, Asian students, Latinx/e students, immigrant students, and Jewish students are the targets of white supremacy and antisemitism, their experiences are too often minimized and not taken seriously by their peers,

their teachers, their communities, and other people in positions of authority.⁵⁸ For example, the student whose classmate called them the N-word and told them to go to the back of the classroom like Rosa Parks reported that the teacher was aware of the comment, but ignored it.⁵⁹ Another student recounted how her friends reacted when she confided in them that a classmate drew swastikas on her property during a history lesson on World War II:

*I didn't really know this person, you know, . . . So I didn't know how to take what he was doing. . . . I confided in[] my friends at the time who were friends with him and I was like, 'Should I report him? Because, you know, that's a hate symbol. You know, I don't, I don't really feel safe in his vicinity if he's like drawing hate symbols and everywhere, you know?' And they just kind of told me like, . . . 'Oh, don't report him because you're going to ruin his future his junior year. Like, you don't want to, you don't want to be the reason why he gets sent back to district.' And then he approached me too. Cause I guess it got around to him and he was like, 'You can't take a joke. You just need to learn how to live a little and you need to stop taking things so seriously.'*⁶⁰

The student whose white peer posted videos to TikTok referring to Black women as objects to be auctioned and Black men as apes described the active resistance he and his peers faced when calling for an appropriate response from their school. On a community Facebook group, parents in the community urged the school not to take action against the student who posted the video because it would “ruin their life.” They characterized it as simply “a foolish thing to post” and dismissed it as a joke.⁶¹ The reporting student spoke quite powerfully about the ability to hold students accountable for dehumanizing conduct without ruining their life: “[We] don’t want to suspend students for every single thing. We want it to be acknowledged. Even an apology would go a really long way. It’s overly politicized, because it’s not political.”⁶² He also underscored what it felt like to watch his community implore him and his peers not to ruin the video poster’s life, while they failed to acknowledge that “the victim is being impacted much more severely.”⁶³

*[N]ot only did us . . . ourselves feel diminished in the sense that we were being dehumanized and our value wasn't really being acknowledged but it was also the fact that, how is this being allowed? How does a student feel emboldened to disrespect and disregard the experiences of other individuals? And it was at that point that we really saw the notions of white supremacy seep into our personal lives It was truly that sense of empowerment that people feel entitled to disrespect other individuals that further cause[d us] to talk to our teachers and peers about this. And when bringing up this issue and acknowledging that we feel uncomfortable by this video and we believe that our administrators should address it.*⁶⁴

Another student shared that white teachers “do not see racism as bullying. Their perception of bullying is based on their experience, and they’re white.”⁶⁵ They explained further, “When I report racism or my friends report racism, it’s not taken seriously. I’ve seen kids kicked out for cursing, but when I tell teachers someone uses the n-word, nothing happens.” For example, in kindergarten, that student told a teacher that a kid called her the n-word, but the teacher did

nothing. A few days later, when the same student called her the n-word again, and she responded by telling him to “shut up,” she was threatened with a suspension but the other student was not.⁶⁶ Another student shared a similar sentiment, saying they wished they had had a Black teacher in elementary or middle school, because “I’ve had a lot of racial incidents with a lot of kids. I run to white teachers and they tell me there’s nothing to worry about. It’s not a big deal. [Be]cause they don’t actually understand the gravity of the experience. But you know, if I ran to a Black teacher, they would understand”⁶⁷

Former white supremacist violent extremist Shannon Foley-Martinez said that her experience consulting with schools corroborates the students’ claims. For example, when asked how they responded to something like a swastika being drawn on a bathroom door, even high school officials make excuses not to address it and say things like “It was just a little swastika,” or “It was just a joke,” or the students who did it “don’t know what that means.”⁶⁸

These kinds of experiences at school led one student to define white supremacy as:

[T]he mindset . . . whether it’s subconscious or consciously knowing, . . . that you can kind of do what you feel like without ever having to take actual responsibility for it, because there have been numerous occasions at previous schools that I’ve

“Racism is a huge contributing factor to adverse childhood experiences [R]acism and systemic oppression are toxic stressors that lead to adverse long-term health and [mental health] concerns. . . .”

been to where the, um, you know, the dominant race was white, where they have just been able to do anything and completely get away with it [W]hereas I know if anyone of my race would have done the same thing, it would have been a much heavier consequence And then I notice . . . how much they can sometimes take advantage of that. It’s like the knowing that, ‘Hey, I’m white, so I can do this.’ And ‘Hey, I’ve gotten away with that before. So maybe if I take this a step further, I’ll be able to get away with that as well.’ So I think it’s kind of just

*the mindset . . . , whether you’re doing it consciously or subconsciously, knowing that there are a lot of things that you can get away with that other races would definitely be punished way harder”*⁶⁹

This is true even though an extensive body of research corroborates the harms white supremacy inflicts on mental and physical health.⁷⁰ Together, the testimonials from the listening sessions and the medical literature underscore why racism has been deemed a public health crisis.⁷¹

After listening to the students’ experiences, one mental health expert posed the question: “Would you label any of those experiences as traumatic, and do you see where it shows up in your life?”

One student responded:

Definitely. . . . I'm always on edge around new people who aren't [people of color] and who haven't grown up around people of color. I'm constantly scared. I don't know your background. I don't know if you're going to hate crime me.⁷²

The mental health experts present throughout both sessions were unanimous in acknowledging the trauma wrought by white supremacy.⁷³ One mental health expert who worked extensively with the students throughout the listening sessions explained:

Racism is a huge contributing factor to adverse childhood experiences [R]acism and systemic oppression are toxic stressors that lead to adverse long-term health and [mental health] concerns. . . .

It is evident that some, if not all, the young people who participated in the listening session are suffering from some form of anxiety due to exposure of toxic stress at school and within their communities.⁷⁴

2. Through a Deliberate Strategy to Normalize and Mainstream White Supremacist Ideologies, Extremists Influence Community Members to Promote White Supremacist Causes.

White Supremacist Violent Extremist Groups and Anti-Government or Militia Extremist Groups Often Share Membership and Promote False Narratives to Gain Popular Support for Extremist Attacks.

Although “white supremacist violent extremists,” “anti-government extremists,” and “militia extremists” are separate categories of extremism, the United States Department of Homeland Security’s 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment noted that “many” of the domestic violent extremists who participated in attacks in 2019 were “motivated by multiple violent extremist ideologies.”⁷⁵ Frank Meeink, a former Neo-Nazi, said that he sees little distinction between the ideology of the Neo-Nazi and KKK organizations he was once part of and associated with and the rhetoric he sees members of organizations like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters promote now. Of those groups, he said: “They are all white supremacists, white nationalists. They are exactly what I used to be”⁷⁶ At least with respect to the Proud Boys, Meeink’s analysis was corroborated both in an article published in the CTC Sentinel,⁷⁷ a publication of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, and by the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol (“Select Committee”). The CTC Sentinel article explained that the Proud Boys describe themselves as “Western Chauvinists,” which is an ideology “defined by the perception that Western European culture is superior” to other cultures.⁷⁸ It also documented an extensive history of shared membership between the Proud Boys and white supremacist violent extremist groups, noting that the Proud Boys have “long held a ‘permeable barrier’ with white supremacist groups . . . as well as Neo-Nazi accelerationist terror groups . . . fighting alongside them at protests and sharing members.”⁷⁹ And the Select Committee described the Proud Boys as “a far right street fighting group that glorifies violence and white supremacy” and outlined how they worked together with other extremist groups, such as the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, to carry out the January 6th insurrection.⁸⁰

Jon Lewis, a co-author of the CTC Sentinel article and a Research Fellow with George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, spoke powerfully at the listening sessions about how three critical events in 2020 – the COVID-19 pandemic, the racial justice protests following the murder of George Floyd, and the 2020 presidential election – galvanized members of white supremacist violent extremist groups, anti-government and militia extremist groups, and others and led to their joint participation around a set of shared narratives and targets.⁸¹

For example, even though 93% of the Black Lives Matter⁸² protests in the summer of 2020 were peaceful,⁸³ white supremacist violent extremists and anti-government and militia extremists were highly effective at stoking fear and promoting the false narrative that many Black Lives Matter protests were violent.⁸⁴ At the listening sessions, extremism experts highlighted that

both white supremacist violent extremists and militia extremists leveraged this misinformation and fear to justify their presence at racial justice protests in 2020, claiming they were there to “protect property” based on “false rumors of Black Lives Matter violence”⁸⁵ The United States Department of Homeland Security’s 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment corroborates these strategies, documenting the role such extremists played in exploiting “otherwise peaceful protest movements” to incite violence themselves.⁸⁶

Both white supremacist violent extremists and anti-government and militia extremists also played a role in spreading the false narrative that the 2020 election was “stolen” from President Donald Trump,⁸⁷ even though then-President Trump lost the 2020 election by seven million votes and over seventy Electoral College votes⁸⁸ and his claims of widespread voter fraud have not been substantiated.⁸⁹ During DCR’s June 9th listening session, Jon Lewis explained that this false narrative led ordinary Americans and violent extremists to join in a planned insurrection against the United States government during the January 6th Capitol Attack.⁹⁰ The indictments charged a range of individuals—not just “a hardcore QAnon believer [and] a Three Percenter from New Jersey,” but also “a mother and son” who were inspired to take part in the violent attack by the false narrative that the election had been stolen.⁹¹

White supremacist ideology and symbols permeated the January 6th insurrection, leading to a racialized assault on the U.S. Capitol. Black law enforcement officers, in particular, were targets of race-based violence and slurs during the attack. U.S. Capitol Police Pfc. Harry Dunn testified that he and other Black officers faced disturbing racial epithets during the January 6th insurrection.⁹² Officer Dunn was repeatedly called the n-word to his face while in uniform—a first in his career as an officer. He described a confrontation with a mob that screamed “Boo! [expletive] N*****!”. Another Black Officer shared with Officer Dunn that one insurrectionist told him to “put your gun down and we’ll show you what kind of n***** you really are!”⁹³ And many insurrectionists displayed explicit white supremacist symbols and paraphernalia.⁹⁴ During his testimony to the January 6th Select Committee, Officer Dunn shared the persistent emotional trauma he continued to experience based upon the events of that day.

These are not the only false narratives that have been leveraged by white supremacist extremists to inflict harm on non-white communities. False narratives blaming Asians for the COVID-19 pandemic led to a marked rise in anti-Asian bias incidents in New Jersey and the nation.⁹⁵ And false narratives regarding Muslims after 9/11 have led to the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim sentiment, the surveillance of Muslim-American communities, and public support for the government to implement a Muslim travel ban.⁹⁶

The mainstreaming of these false narratives is consistent with a deliberate, decades-long strategy by white supremacists to discard visible markers of extremism in order to make their white supremacist rhetoric more palatable and more readily accepted.

White Supremacist Violent Extremists Have a Deliberate, Decades-Long Strategy to Blend into Mainstream Society and Promote Fear and False Narratives to Normalize White Supremacy.

Several extremism experts spoke at the listening sessions about the “mainstreaming” of white supremacist violent extremist and militia extremist ideologies and conspiracy theories.⁹⁷ They also discussed the strategies white supremacist violent extremists use to normalize hate, recruit members, and inspire non-members to act on white supremacist ideologies.⁹⁸ At the June 9 listening session, former Neo-Nazi Frank Meeink described this as “politically motivated violence.”⁹⁹ In a 2018 interview with NPR, former Neo-Nazi Christian Picciolini explained the strategy in detail:

I do think that there were a lot of concerted strategies in the ‘80s and ‘90s that we’re seeing take hold today. We recognized in the mid-‘80s that our edginess, our look, even our language, was turning away the average American white racist – people we wanted to recruit. So we decided then to grow our hair out, to stop getting tattoos that would identify us, to trade in our boots for suits and to go to college campuses and recruit there and enroll, to get jobs in law enforcement, to go to the military and get training and to even run for office.

And here we are, 30 years later, and we’re using terms like “white nationalist” and “alt-right” – terms that [the white supremacists] came up with, by the way. They sat around and said, “How can we identify ourselves to make us seem less hateful?” ... Here we are in 2018 and we have a lot of hallmarks coming from political figures, the administration and policies that are very similar to what we espoused 30 years ago. The language may be a little bit more palatable. Dog whistles may be used, but it is still the same underlying theme. It is a white supremacist culture that is being pushed.”¹⁰⁰

Speakers at the listening sessions highlighted several fears or false narratives that white supremacist violent extremists have sought to push into our country’s mainstream political discourse. Oren Segal, Vice President of the ADL’s Center on Extremism, highlighted two core tenets of white supremacist violent extremist ideology that are at the root of many of these false narratives – the concepts of “white genocide” and “the great replacement.”¹⁰¹

According to the “white genocide” narrative, “the white race itself is going to be, and is, threatened with imminent extinction . . . unless white people are willing to take action.”¹⁰² According to this narrative, the white race is “doomed by this riding tide of color – people like immigrants, people of other religions, brown people, and they’re being manipulated specifically by the Jews.”¹⁰³ This narrative encourages white people to “defend your culture or your people”¹⁰⁴ against a perceived threat to erase them. The “great replacement” narrative is similar, perpetuating the idea that an influx of immigrants will erase white heritage and white culture in America.¹⁰⁵

These tenets of white supremacist violent extremist ideology have contributed to the spread of several narratives that have circulated widely in mainstream political discourse in recent years. The first flows from the “great replacement” theory and is intended to instill a fear of immigrants

and inspire resistance to non-white immigration: the claim that there is an “invasion” of Hispanic migrants at the southern U.S. border.¹⁰⁶ As earlier noted, this narrative motivated the white supremacist terrorist attack in El Paso, Texas in 2019 that killed 23 people; the shooter’s manifesto claimed the attack was motivated by a “Hispanic invasion of Texas.”¹⁰⁷ This narrative also motivated the 2018 shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh that claimed 11 lives.¹⁰⁸ “Great replacement” theory has also contributed to the spread of false narratives accusing the LGBTQIA+ community of pedophilia and of “grooming” children, claiming “LGBTQ+ culture” is “promoted by elites to encourage lower white birthrates in order to ‘replace’ the white population with Black and Brown people.”¹⁰⁹ “[A]nti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric now serves as a rallying call for at least some white supremacists,” motivating white supremacists to target LGBTQIA+ Pride events and promote opposition to LGBTQIA+ education.¹¹⁰

Mary McCord, Executive Director of the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown, explained that white supremacists are using another, related false narrative to recruit: “Right now, there is a big and important discussion going on . . . about teaching our youth about white supremacy, teaching what’s called ‘critical race theory.’ “ McCord noted “that is being used¹¹¹ . . . [And] that is being used by white supremacists to try to create a narrative that white children are victims because they’re going to be taught what we know is the truth about our history, but what white supremacists want to keep hidden.”¹¹² The Anti-Defamation League has explained that white supremacists



“see critical race theory as evidence of ‘white genocide’” and “are trying to harness debates around CRT to perpetuate the white supremacist conspiracy theory that the white race is under attack.”¹¹³

Mainstream White Supremacist Talking Points Have Successfully Convinced Community Members to Advocate Against Effective Tools for Combatting White Supremacist Extremism.

During the listening sessions, community member after community member spoke about the importance of education in combatting white supremacy.¹¹⁴ The students who participated in the listening sessions consistently expressed a desire for their schools to institute a mandatory class that accurately teaches young people about the history of racism.¹¹⁵ As one student put it, “That would fix a lot of my problems in the school, if my peers were to know the historical information of where racism comes from.”¹¹⁶ This echoes feedback New Jersey’s Interagency Task Force to Combat Youth Bias heard during statewide listening sessions it held in the fall of 2019 on the

topic of youth bias: “[B]oth those students who had never been taught an anti-bias curriculum and the students and educators who have seen anti-bias education in action called for it to be made a mandatory and integral part of all students’ educational experience in New Jersey. This recommendation was, by far, the most explicit and consistent request stakeholders made of the Task Force.”¹¹⁷

The mainstreaming of false narratives around Critical Race Theory have led many people – from local parents¹¹⁸ and school board members¹¹⁹ to members of the New Jersey legislature¹²⁰ and former President Donald Trump¹²¹ – to oppose teaching not only Critical Race Theory itself, which is a body of legal scholarship taught in law school and some college-level coursework, but also any attempt to teach about the history of racism in America in K-12 schools.¹²² And the mainstreaming of false narratives painting LGBTQIA+ education as “‘indoctrination’ and ‘sexualization’ of children” has similarly led community members in New Jersey¹²³ and throughout the country to support bans seeking to censor any effort by educators to teach truthful information about the LGBTQIA+ community.¹²⁴

Students and community members recounted their experience navigating community resistance to important tools for combatting white supremacy. One community member made clear that resistance to learning about topics that challenge white supremacy is not a new phenomenon:

*When I was in high school, I was bothered by the increasing reports of police involved violence in communities of color around the country. At the time, the latest victim was a man in the South Bronx named Amadou Diallo. For an English assignment, while in high school, I chose to write a persuasive paper about policing in communities of color. My teacher at the time instructed me to choose another topic.*¹²⁵

A student shared a similar experience from several years ago:

*[W]hen we were learning about Indian culture and Indian mythology within schools, . . . I actually asked my teacher if I could do a piece on brown suppression within the United States and was told that that would not be appropriate because it doesn’t go in line with the thematic themes of the NJ core curriculum.*¹²⁶

Another student expressed that parental opposition is a significant factor to schools’ decisions on these topics. When the student asked their school to host a discussion about police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement, the school declined, blaming the “drama” that would result when local parents voiced their opposition.¹²⁷

Another student expressed frustration at the hesitancy to institute “racially equitable education reform,” emphasizing that “[w]e also have to acknowledge that this isn’t something that’s partisan. . . . Nobody deserves to be disrespected and nobody deserves to feel dehumanized.”¹²⁸

3. Some White Supremacist Violent Extremists Have Pursued a Deliberate Strategy to Infiltrate Government Institutions and (Mis)Use Their Authority to Harass, Assault, Incarcerate, and Disenfranchise Black People and Other People of Color.

Some white supremacist violent extremists and members of adjacent extremist groups have been executing on a deliberate strategy to infiltrate government institutions, including positions in law enforcement and other positions of authority in government, for decades.

Most recently, members of the same extremist organizations that carried out the January 6th insurrection have sought positions of power in all levels of government, from state legislatures and executive offices¹²⁹ to local school boards.¹³⁰ This is part of a deliberate strategy by extremist organizations to shift away from national organizing in the wake of the January 6th insurrection “to focus on building grass-roots support” in order “to influence school boards and other local offices.”¹³¹ According to anti-extremism experts, these groups’ efforts to elect members to local school boards are “an extension of an ‘inside/outside’ tactic of armed groups fielding candidates for legitimate posts while simultaneously agitating for political violence.”¹³² In other words, some group members run for school boards and local offices, while others show up at protests or meetings “with the goal of intimidating the other side and attracting new members with a show of force.”¹³³ For example, members of the Oath Keepers, an organization that shares overlapping membership with white supremacist groups, have run for office throughout the country, including in New Jersey,¹³⁴ and have been elected to state office in several States.¹³⁵

The limited publicly available information on organizations’ membership suggests that members of extremist groups have successfully obtained positions in critical government institutions, including in New Jersey. On September 6, 2022, Distributed Denial of Secrets, a non-profit whistleblower site, published the membership data of the Oath Keepers.¹³⁶ This data included the names of hundreds of U.S. law enforcement officers, elected officials, and military members.¹³⁷ The Anti-Defamation League found that over 500 New Jerseyans were listed in the membership data, including one elected official, two members of the military, twelve members of law enforcement, and four first responders.¹³⁸ And one New Jerseyan who was convicted and sentenced for his role in the January 6th insurrection — and who was described by prosecutors as subscribing to both “White Supremacist and Nazi-Sympathizer ideologies” — was enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves and worked as a contractor at the Earle Naval Weapons Station in Colts Neck at the time of the attack.¹³⁹

White supremacists have also deliberately attempted to infiltrate law enforcement for well over a decade.¹⁴⁰ There is limited data on the number of white supremacist extremists in law enforcement. In 2006, however, the FBI issued an intelligence assessment titled “White Supremacist Infiltration of Law Enforcement.”¹⁴¹ That assessment acknowledged that “[w]hite supremacist leaders and groups have historically shown an interest in infiltrating law enforcement communities or recruiting law enforcement personnel.”¹⁴² It also noted that reported cases “tend to reflect self-

initiated efforts by white supremacist sympathizers, particularly among those already within law enforcement, to use their professional skills for the benefit of white supremacist causes.”¹⁴³ And it explained that, in infiltrating the ranks of law enforcement, white supremacist violent extremists sought to “avoid overt displays of their beliefs to blend into society and covertly advance white supremacist causes.”¹⁴⁴ Similarly, a 2015 FBI counterterrorism policy guide stated that “[d]omestic terrorism investigations focused on militia extremists, white supremacist extremists, and sovereign citizen extremists often have identified active links to law enforcement officers.”¹⁴⁵

Participants in the listening sessions echoed those observations. In response to the question, “What conduct did you or your group engage in with the goal of targeting or intimidating communities of color?,” former Neo-Nazi Frank Meeink stated that “[t]here are tons of Neo-Nazi police” and “[t]ons of far-right extremist police.”¹⁴⁶ This was one of the most chilling statements from the listening sessions. According to Meeink, in the early 1990s, white supremacist violent extremist organizations, including the Neo-Nazi groups he belonged to and groups like the KKK, began instructing younger members to stop sporting well-known symbols of white supremacist violent extremism – like shaved heads and swastika tattoos – in order to gain entry to police departments and the military.¹⁴⁷ Meeink was adamant that “[t]ons of supporters and allies” of the Neo-Nazi movement became cops, and that there is still a call for those associated with white supremacist violent extremist organizations to become cops.¹⁴⁸

Meeink emphasized that this strategy was utilized by white supremacist violent extremists here in New Jersey, and “especially in South Jersey.”¹⁴⁹ His claims draw support from a 2019 law review article by Vida Johnson, an Associate Professor of Law at Georgetown Law School, which documented “178 instances of explicit racial bias by members of the police in 48 states,” including six instances in New Jersey.¹⁵⁰ One of those six cases involved a town’s police chief slamming a Black teenager’s head against a metal door jamb. He was recorded by fellow officers repeatedly referring to the teen and his aunt with racial slurs, including one recording in which he said, “I’m f*****g tired of them, man. I’ll tell you what, it’s gonna get to the point where I could shoot one of these m*****f*****s. And that n***** b***** lady, she almost got it.”¹⁵¹

Adjacent extremist groups have followed a similar strategy. On May 26, 2021, former New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal testified before Congress that “New Jersey law enforcement agencies have recognized the risk that militia extremism will infiltrate their ranks, especially after the Jersey City Police Department disclosed that it had identified a cadre of self-styled Three Percenters in one of its units in 2013.”¹⁵² Similar concerns were corroborated by the Anti-Defamation League’s analysis of Oath Keepers’ membership data, discussed above, indicating that twelve members of New Jersey law enforcement were listed in the Oath Keepers’ membership data.¹⁵³ As discussed above, Meeink stated that he recognizes white supremacist violent extremist ideology in the rhetoric of these extremist groups, and personally knows white supremacist violent extremists to be among their membership.

In the past several years, there has been more sustained attention to exposing and dismantling white supremacist infiltration of the military and law enforcement. For example, on September 15, 2020, the United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held a hearing entitled, “Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part IV): White Supremacy in

Blue – The Infiltration of Local Police Departments.”¹⁵⁴ And many local law enforcement agencies have taken a closer look at the issue since learning that members of their ranks participated in the Capitol Attack.¹⁵⁵

Perhaps more chilling than the realization that white supremacist violent extremists have a strategy to infiltrate law enforcement, however, is their reason for doing so: to (mis)use their authority to harass, assault, incarcerate, and disenfranchise Black people and other people of color. According to Meeink:

*[W]hite supremacist [violent extremist] leaders encourage their followers to join the police force as a means to cause harm to people of color. . . . **They told us to join law enforcement, so that we can give Blacks felonies. So that they wouldn't be able to legally arm themselves. So that they wouldn't be able to vote.***¹⁵⁶

In a follow-up call, Meeink stated that white supremacist violent extremists “love being the arresting officers” because “it’s code for, ‘[W]e get to kick the s*** out of Black people and get away with it.’”¹⁵⁷ He also claimed that “racist Neo Nazi” officers have been using car searches in the suburbs for many decades as “a way to make sure [Black] people know that they’re not welcome.”¹⁵⁸

“[W]hite supremacist [violent extremist] leaders encourage their followers to join the police force as a means to cause harm to people of color. . . . They told us to join law enforcement, so that we can give Blacks felonies. So that they wouldn't be able to legally arm themselves. So that they wouldn't be able to vote.”

He claims such officers institute searches without probable cause, sometimes falsely claiming that police dogs have signaled for the presence of drugs, and then try to talk down to people of color to provoke a response so they can call it an assault on an officer and justify an arrest.¹⁵⁹

According to ABC News, the claim that white supremacist violent extremists seek to join law enforcement agencies to inflict harm and violence on Black people and other people of color is corroborated by a confidential

intelligence assessment issued in February 2021, which concluded that white supremacist and other extremists would seek military and law enforcement affiliations. According to the article, the assessment indicated that “[i]n some cases, [the extremists] wanted to join the military or police so they would be able to commit acts of violence towards members of minority groups.”¹⁶⁰ Meeink’s claims draw further support from a Brennan Center report titled “Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism, White Supremacy, and Far-Right Militancy in Law Enforcement.” That report documents incidents in which white supremacist extremists or those espousing white supremacist ideologies have been identified among law enforcement. The report includes a number of examples of such law enforcement officers misusing their authority – or expressly discussing a desire to misuse

their authority – to harm people of color.¹⁶¹ Similarly, Vida Johnson’s law review article compiling accounts of explicit racial bias by members of the police documented incidents perpetrated by individuals with known ties to white supremacist extremist organizations.¹⁶²

These claims are particularly concerning in light of data that continues to show Black motorists are more likely than white motorists to be searched, arrested, and subject to force during a traffic stop. For example, data released by New Jersey State Police shows that “[e]ven though the *number* of white motorists stopped by officers was nearly triple that of Blacks [from 2018-2020], more Blacks were physically searched, more had their vehicles searched, and more were arrested than whites.”¹⁶³ The data also showed that “officers reported using force roughly twice as often in stops involving Hispanics than whites and four times more often in stops of Black motorists.”¹⁶⁴

Recently enacted legislation in New Jersey aims to provide important tools to address white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement. In July 2022, Governor Murphy signed into law a police licensing program for all New Jersey law enforcement officers.¹⁶⁵ The legislation, which was shepherded by the Attorney General and supported by police unions in New Jersey, requires all law enforcement officers in New Jersey to hold a valid, active license issued by the Police Training Commission (PTC). The law requires the PTC to revoke or deny issuance of a license where an individual is an active member of a group that advocates for the violent overthrow of the government or for discrimination based on classes protected by the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD). It also requires the PTC to revoke or deny issuance of a license where an officer engages in conduct or behavior that demonstrates, espouses, advocates, or supports discrimination or violence against, or hatred and bias towards, individuals or groups based on any characteristic protected under the Law Against Discrimination.¹⁶⁶



4. White Supremacist Violent Extremists and Adjacent Extremist Groups Recruit White People – Especially Young White People – by Leveraging Their Insecurities to Inspire Them to Target Others.

Young White People Who Have Experienced Trauma Are Vulnerable to Recruitment.

Trauma does not excuse participation in white supremacy. Yet it is so often a factor in why young white people turn to white supremacist violent extremism that parents, educators, and others who interact with children need to understand the role trauma can play in radicalizing young white people. This is especially true because, as Mary McCord explained, “[y]outh are important to extremist movements.”¹⁶⁷

When asked what led them to white supremacist violent extremist groups at an early age, both Frank Meeink and Shannon Foley Martinez described early experiences with abuse. For Meeink, physical abuse at the hands of his stepfather was exacerbated by the experience of living in poverty. He was kicked out of his house, and transitioned to a new, predominantly Black school where he got into fights. “[T]hat rage I had from being beat at home, being neglected at home, and now . . . I’m at school and I got to fist fight all these kids all the time . . . I was so full of fear that it finally turned to hate and rage.”¹⁶⁸ Foley Martinez’s experience was different in important ways, but also markedly similar in others: She grew up in a family “that from the outside looked really like the idyllic middle-class family, but inside my family there was a lot of dysfunction.” She did not feel like she “belonged,” and after her family moved from New Jersey to Michigan, “it expanded that sense of not really belonging anywhere out into the greater world.”¹⁶⁹ Then, at the age of 14, she was sexually assaulted by two white men at a party. She explained how that trauma led to her joining a Nazi skinhead group:

I didn’t have any trusted adults in my life that I could tell. So I took that additional trauma, um, completely unprocessed and just like shoved it down. And the main way that, that manifested in my life was through rage that I didn’t understand, and I didn’t have the skills or tools to process. . . . I felt really worthless and I felt like I didn’t have any worth or value. I felt like my body was trash. I was trash and I was so angry and I feel like the rage within me resonated with the rage [the Nazi skinheads] displayed.¹⁷⁰

The experts on extremism and mental health agreed that white supremacist violent extremists target young people who are insecure or made vulnerable by trauma.¹⁷¹ Foley Martinez explained how exposure to multiple layers of trauma can render someone vulnerable to recruitment by white supremacist violent extremists: “One of the things [trauma] does to your brain is that you feel like the entire world is a dangerous and threatening place. . . . [S]o when somebody offers you a group of others or a very easy to hold onto explanation . . . for why the whole world feels dangerous and threatening and who’s at fault, that . . . is incredibly easy to hold on to.”¹⁷²

Both Foley Martinez and Meeink's experiences are a powerful testimonial for how fear, trauma, and a lack of belonging render white youth vulnerable to recruitment by white supremacist violent extremists. Critically, their experiences also underscore that participation in white supremacy only furthers that trauma. For Foley Martinez, during her time as a Neo-Nazi, "her relationships were abusive and she was exposed to violence by group leaders."¹⁷³ And Meeink put it pointedly: *"Hate did nothing but eat my insides out when I was in it."*¹⁷⁴

Often, white supremacist narratives also prey specifically on young white men's insecurities. A report titled "An Anti-Bias Vision for the Next Generation," issued by New Jersey's Interagency Task Force to Combat Youth Bias in October 2020, flagged that "[h]ate groups have . . . become experts at using young, white men's insecurities about masculinity and racial status to recruit them."¹⁷⁵ Remarks from former Neo-Nazi Frank Meeink shed light on how this recruitment occurs. One reoccurring theme when discussing the narratives that drew Meeink into white supremacy was the idea that "someone's getting what's mine, or what I . . . perceived as mine."¹⁷⁶ This is reflected by research on white supremacists, which has found that "a sense of victimhood is exactly what [white supremacist] groups . . . use to grow their cause."¹⁷⁷ That narrative surfaced in everything from outrage at the existence of Black Entertainment Television (BET)¹⁷⁸ to claims that if white people are not vigilant, "Black people [will] run rampant" and Black men will "rape all the white women."¹⁷⁹



According to Meeink, seeing white women with Black men fuels white supremacist violent extremist recruitment.¹⁸⁰ These false recruitment narratives are rooted in the "white genocide" theory discussed above. That theory claims "that Jewish people are working to erase the 'white race,' by promoting immigration, intermarriage, and multiculturalism."¹⁸¹ Based on that theory, white supremacist violent extremists "often use the idea that white women need to be 'protected' as a justification for their violence" and advance the notion that "[w]hite women should be under the control of white men and have more children in order to increase the white population."¹⁸² These sentiments promote a dangerous toxic masculinity shared across extremist groups, under which white men's sexual activity – or the lack thereof – is a prominent driver of extremist activity. For example, to ascend to the second rank of the Proud Boys, prospective members must both: (1) "submit to a ritualistic assault-by-punching from at least five members"; and (2) "commit[] to abstinence from masturbation."¹⁸³ According to the group's founder, "such abstinence spiritually reinvigorates men and encourages what [he] viewed as more traditional male behavior."¹⁸⁴

White Supremacist Violent Extremists Recruit and Radicalize By Leveraging Social Media and Other Media Platforms to Normalize Hate.

New Jersey's OHSP 2020 Threat Assessment elevated white supremacist violent extremists to a "high" threat in 2020 due in part to their effectiveness in recruiting online:

*White supremacist extremists will pose a high threat to New Jersey in 2020 as supporters of this ideology demonstrate their willingness and capability to carry out attacks, direct and inspire sympathizers online, and attempt to network globally.*¹⁸⁵

New Jersey's OHSP 2022 Terrorism Threat Assessment continued to identify white supremacist violent extremist's social media use as a factor in the "high" threat they continue to pose to the state:

*[White supremacist extremists] will likely use social media as an avenue to spread their ideology, recruit new members, and communicate.*¹⁸⁶

Foley Martinez put the danger posed by white supremacist violent extremist recruitment in online spaces this way:

*The internet is an absolute game changer . . . [I]t was very unlikely that my life would collide with this stuff because it had to happen in a physical space. I had to meet another human being or have a physical copy of a book. And now . . . everybody online is going to see racist or antisemitic comments or content online.*¹⁸⁷

Steve Crimando of the New Jersey Department of Human Services agreed:

"Online recruitment today happens in every domain of the internet sphere, it happens in online forums and chat rooms and boards, it happens in . . . multiplayer games [where] people are communicating within the gaming system. It happens on social media networks . . . [and] even on the apps on our phones and our devices . . ."

Online recruitment today happens in every domain of the internet sphere, it happens in online forums and chat rooms and boards, it happens in . . . multiplayer games [where] people are communicating within the gaming system. It happens on social media networks . . . [and] even on the apps on our phones and our devices . . . [T]here's really not a place [on the internet] where our recruiters and radicalizers don't tap our technologies and find a way to really reach out,

*especially for younger people who've grown up in an environment with these devices.*¹⁸⁸

The experts who spoke at the listening sessions echoed what “An Anti-Bias Vision for the Next Generation” had already highlighted:

*[White supremacists] are fluent in the internet humor and culture of young people, using ‘jokes and memes as a way to normalize bigotry while still maintaining plausible deniability.’ Using these skills, [white supremacists] generate content designed to reach a broad youth audience online, including, for example, YouTube videos, Reddit and 4chan forums, innocuous-seeming websites, and online memes.*¹⁸⁹

According to Mary McCord, white supremacists regularly “us[e] videos and memes and jokes that are . . . racist or sexist, that are anti-LGBTQ, that are antisemitic . . . to normalize that type of bigotry.”¹⁹⁰ Social media algorithms then expand the reach of this online content by funneling more and more of it to someone once they have begun viewing it.¹⁹¹ Steve Crimando agreed, stressing that social media algorithms “continually but gradually lead people deeper into these extreme belief systems” and “can happen in these very subtle ways where the individual themselves, never mind their parents, or loved ones, or friends,” may not even notice. According to Crimando, “they can happen through very, very subtle forms of manipulation over time.”¹⁹²



But social media is not the only media platform that perpetuates and normalizes white supremacist violent extremist ideology. Participants in the listening sessions suggested that white supremacist narratives are so pervasive that they can even be found in mainstream news outlets. For example, Frank Meeink was particularly critical of the rhetoric of former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, claiming that he “takes from white supremacist talking points” and “preaches the same things that [Meeink] preached as a Neo-Nazi,” using terminology and “dog whistles” that white supremacist violent extremists understand.¹⁹³ The ADL has raised the same concern about Tucker Carlson’s rhetoric. After a segment in April 2021 in which Carlson echoed “great replacement” theory, the ADL wrote a letter to Fox News decrying Carlson for his “open-ended endorsement of white supremacist ideology.”¹⁹⁴ ADL wrote that Carlson’s “rhetoric was not just a dog whistle to racists – it was a bullhorn.”¹⁹⁵ ADL also tracked the reaction of white supremacist violent extremists

online in the days after their letter about Carlson became public. Following Carlson's segment, one 4Chan user wrote: "As predicted, Carlson is our guy."¹⁹⁶ This aligns with Meeink's experience: Neo-Nazis have told Meeink they watch Tucker Carlson, "once for entertainment, and again for [talking points]."¹⁹⁷

Signs of Radicalization

Steve Crimando spoke both to signs of radicalization that span extremist ideologies and to those that are specific to white supremacist extremist radicalization. General signs of radicalization may include:

- A dramatic change in behavior;
- Changing their circle of friends;
- Isolating themselves from family and friends;
- Talking about extremist ideology as if from a scripted speech;
- Unwillingness or inability to discuss their views beyond reciting what sound like scripted talking points (often those in the radicalization process are not fully aware of the depth of the viewpoints they are expressing, and are merely reciting the talking points they have been told);
- A sudden disrespectful attitude towards others;
- Increased levels of anger;
- Increased secretiveness, especially around internet/mobile phone use;
- Accessing extremist material online;
- Using extremist or hate terms to exclude others or incite violence; or
- Writing or creating artwork promoting violent extremist messages.¹⁹⁸

Signs of white supremacist recruitment specifically may include adopting the signage of white supremacy, including symbols like the "OK" hand gesture, which white supremacist violent extremists use to convey "White Power."¹⁹⁹ It may also include getting tattoos of or otherwise displaying white supremacist symbols²⁰⁰ (though, for reasons discussed earlier in this report, some individuals radicalized to white supremacist violent extremism may avoid overt displays).

5. “Dismantling White Supremacy Is Not on Black People”: The Importance of Partnering with Communities of Color to Counter White Supremacy.

Both of the former violent white supremacist extremists who spoke at the listening sessions emphasized the need for white people to actively participate in dismantling white supremacy. Frank Meeink put it bluntly: “[D]ismantling white supremacy is not on Black people. It is on us [white people] to get this done and it’s time to get to work.”²⁰¹ And after moderating the student breakout room at the July 14 session, Shannon Foley Martinez observed:

[O]ur youth breakout room to talk about and tackle . . . white supremacy and recruitment . . . [was] nearly an entirely [Jewish and non-white] group of people. And that seems something that is problematic and we should wrestle with how to get white faces in this conversation since . . . [they’re] the ones who are overwhelmingly radicalizing into violent expressions of white supremacy . . . and not put the labor of sharing . . . those experiences and problem-solving onto the targets and victims of white supremacy.”²⁰²

Foley Martinez emphasized the need to bring white community members into conversations about white supremacy, and to resist the urge to externalize white supremacy onto its most violent actors.²⁰³

Throughout the listening sessions, the experts and community members who spoke conveyed a series of best practices for dismantling white supremacy and emphasized the need for white community members to join community members who have been targeted by white supremacy in taking ownership over dismantling it.²⁰⁴ The next section compiles those best practices.

BEST PRACTICES FOR DISMANTLING WHITE SUPREMACY

What emerged from the listening sessions was, in many ways, a set of best practices for community members to dismantle white supremacy in their day-to-day lives and protect themselves, their children, and our entire community from white supremacist radicalization:

1. Listen to and learn from the experiences of those targeted by white supremacy – especially people of color.

As one community member at the listening session put it, “[W]e all have biases. I have biases. You have biases. We all have biases, whether they’re conscious, we’re acting on them, or they are unconscious.”²⁰⁵ Yet individuals shared that white community members too often downplay, dismiss, or ignore people of color when they try to point biases out, rather than treating the dialogue as an opportunity for growth.²⁰⁶

*I had one of my friends, . . . I did something stupid in a [video] game and he called me a ‘monkey’ for it. And I was like, you can’t say that, it implies something else. And he was like, no, no it’s just calling you stupid. So . . . the, just, inability to recognize a wrong.*²⁰⁷

In one community breakout room, the conversation centered on techniques that community members – and particularly community members of color – can use when confronted with microaggressions²⁰⁸ or offensive comments that perpetuate white supremacy in order to be heard and start a productive dialogue.²⁰⁹ One technique was to address impact rather than intent, acknowledging that a comment can have a hurtful impact on a listener even if that was not the speaker’s intent.²¹⁰

*[S]ometimes when we say to people, [T]he thing you said had this impact on me. I’m confident your intent wasn’t that way, but sometimes despite [your intent], there’s an impact on others.*²¹¹

Another technique was to ask the person who made the offensive statement, “What do you mean?” One Black mental health expert shared that she uses this approach when confronted with microaggressions:

I’ve done that myself, to say, ‘I’m not sure what you mean. Tell me what you mean. I’m not sure I understand this.’ And that comes from a place of, I want some more information and then I will engage a person in a conversation. If it’s someone that I know . . . and if they say something that . . . I feel uncomfortable with, I’m okay to say, ‘I’m not sure what you meant, but I’ll tell you how I took

*it. So help me understand what you meant when you said it, 'cause it was a little offensive to me. And most people, . . . my colleagues, my friends . . . will say, 'I didn't really mean it. Help me understand. I want to try to figure it out. I don't mean to be offensive.' But I said, '[W]ell that's a kind of offensive statement and I need to let you know.'*²¹²

Another community member shared how these techniques of “honest inquiry” drew them into the conversation:

*I am extremely new to understanding the power of microaggressions, and I'm still fairly ignorant. And . . . I really think that as you use this tone of voice in this honest inquiry, I mean, I'm really wanting to learn how not to be, but I think for even people who aren't, . . . you know, they don't realize because they haven't had [the] need to realize, . . . what is transpiring, . . . that [tone of honest inquiry] is . . . very helpful.*²¹³

Community members also emphasized how critical it is to center the voices of those impacted by white supremacy, and avoid elevating white people's efforts to combat white supremacy above those of people of color. One community member recounted seeing this trend repeatedly on social media:

*For example, during the early summer of 2020, it was the George Floyd protest. Various white creators [on social media] gained huge popularity and praise for supporting BLM, while at the same time, these same individuals had numerous accusations of racism. Once the BLM protest came to an end, their advocacy stopped. On the other hand, Black individuals who advocate for the same problems with authenticity and truth never see any [of the] success, coin, or fame . . . these white individuals receive. This is a form of [w]hite supremacy because white individuals feel that false advocacy for social issues [will] grant them fame and fortune White voices become heard over people of color. This is not all white creators but a select few.*²¹⁴

2. Don't contribute to normalizing or mainstreaming hate – in-person or online.

Jokes, memes, videos, and other content that perpetuate racist or antisemitic stereotypes are dehumanizing. They are a recruitment tool,²¹⁵ and we all play a role in identifying them for what they are and shutting them down.

The accounts shared at the listening sessions underscored just how much young people absorb the way adults in their family and community discuss people different from them. Children listen closely, and when adults tell “jokes” that stigmatize a group of people, or blame entire groups of people in times of hardship, those words plant seeds of hatred.

For example, Frank Meeink recalled hearing an antisemitic joke in his neighborhood as a kid: “I went to the store today and Johnny tried to Jew me.” He asked his uncle about it, and his uncle

tried to explain why it was funny. Meeink didn't get it. His uncle told him, "When you're older, you'll get the joke." Then:

I was at my first Neo Nazi meeting and I heard them talking about this secret cabal of Jewish people who secretly run the Earth . . . And so when they started breaking down [the false narrative of] how these Jewish people steal money out of our Federal Reserve and give it to Israel to start the next world war. The joke unlocked. I get what my uncle was saying. I must be adult now. I must be an adult because I'm getting the jokes.²¹⁶

One community member who worked with young people who had been convicted of bias incidents shared this example of what motivated a young offender:

[T]here was a dinner in the home and the father came home and said, 'I lost my job. And I lost my job to those people up the street that don't even speak English.' Well, what a big surprise when the children around the table went and started smashing the windows there. So where did that come from?²¹⁷

3. Proactively discuss race and racism with youth.

Many community members echoed the sentiment that failing to discuss race doesn't make it disappear.²¹⁸ This lived experience is corroborated by ample research demonstrating that children observe societal inequality, and when we fail to explain it to them, they draw their own inferences:

As part of young children's development, they observe, categorize, and replicate the behaviors of the world around them. In a society where race, gender, and other bases of marginalization often exist as observable and significant social categories, children pick up on these existing categories and begin to attach social significance to them, thereby unconsciously internalizing the systemic biases they perceive in the world, even if they are not exposed to overt displays of bias at home. . . . Because children learn from the world around them, the research suggests that children growing up in racially segregated environments are particularly likely to recognize race as an important social category from a very early age. This can set the stage for the development of bias or prejudice, because "[w]hen children notice these patterns, they often infer that these are norms or rules and that the patterns must have been caused by meaningful inherent differences between groups." This tendency is not limited to racial or ethnic segregation, but is equally applicable to other systemic biases that result in perceptible differences between significant social categories. For example, children who notice that our country's president has always been a man may infer that only a man can be president.²¹⁹

In other words, when children are not taught the historical reasons why racial inequality exists, they see racial inequality as "normal." Dismantling white supremacy – for children of any race – means helping them make sense of the inequality they see in the world.²²⁰ Community members emphasized that having these conversations with Black children and other children of color is

especially important for building resilience and helping them to counter the negative stereotypes white supremacy perpetuates.²²¹ And community members underscored the critical role these conversations play in dismantling white supremacy among white children as well.²²²

4. Educate white children on how to avoid recruitment.

Recruitment starts with efforts to enlist white children – often unknowingly – in normalizing hate.²²³ It is therefore critical that children – and especially the white children white supremacist violent extremists target for recruitment – know that jokes, memes, videos, and other online content that stereotype, demean, or scapegoat others is never acceptable, that they should tell a parent or trusted adult when they see it, and that they should not share it. One parent interviewed by the Washington Post described the white supremacist violent extremist content her sons encountered online:

“I saw the memes that came across my kids’ timelines, and once I started clicking on those and seeking this material out, then it became clear what was really happening,” she sa[id]. With each tap of a finger, the memes grew darker: Sexist and racist jokes (for instance, a looping video clip of a white boy demonstrating how to “get away with saying the n-word,” or memes referring to teen girls as “thots,” an acronym for “that ho over there”) led to more racist and dehumanizing propaganda, such as infographics falsely asserting that black people are inherently violent.”²²⁴

If a child encounters this content online, it’s important that responding adults stay calm and talk about it in a way that doesn’t elicit shame or defensiveness.²²⁵ It is more productive to open up a dialogue to help them understand what they saw and why it’s harmful.²²⁶ It is also helpful for adults to become familiar with the language and symbols white supremacist violent extremist recruiters are using so that they are equipped to spot its use among children. Some symbols – like the swastika or the Confederate flag – are obvious. Some symbols – like the “OK” hand gesture or the cartoon figure Pepe the frog – started out as innocent, but now have disturbing significance among white supremacist violent extremists. (The “OK” hand gesture is used to signal “White Power,” and Pepe the Frog is featured in extremist memes.)



Appendix 1, at the end of this report, is a resource guide intended to help parents, caregivers, educators, and community members understand possible signs of white supremacist radicalization and become familiar with white supremacist narratives, symbology, terminology, and groups so they can identify early warning signs of radicalization. However, because white supremacists regularly adopt new symbols and memes, and often adopt seemingly innocuous symbols to convey white supremacist messages, even the most informed caregivers and educators may not be familiar with the full scope of white supremacist symbology. Thus, parents, caregivers, and educators should make a habit of asking young people the significance of the symbols they display and researching unfamiliar symbols and terms.

5. Recognize the risks for and signs of radicalization, and intervene early if you see them.

The experts on extremism were clear: If you notice someone – and especially a young person – exhibiting signs of radicalization, don’t dismiss it as a phase, and do not ignore it. As Jenny Presswalla, Director, Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, United States Department of Homeland Security, explained at the listening session:

Many times what we’ve seen in these situations is when bystanders see these behaviors they want to distance themselves from that person. They want to not engage they want to step away. They want to assume this is just a phase they’ll get over it. ‘This is just a high school teenage phase.’ And what we want to say is that we’ve seen that it’s not.²²⁷

Experts at the listening session spoke to some of the most telling signs of radicalization. According to former Neo-Nazi Frank Meeink, scapegoating is a key sign. If you start noticing that a young person is suddenly casting blame on groups of people, saying things like “if the Blacks didn’t do this” or “the Jews didn’t do that,” you need to intervene.²²⁸ Steve Crimando explained that it is also a red flag if a young person starts displaying white supremacist symbols, whether as a patch or drawing on an item of clothing, in a drawing or poster, as a sketch on their school books, in a tattoo or graffiti, or anywhere else.²²⁹

Frank Meeink also spoke powerfully about what intervention can look like: “Continue to love them, but tell them you will not support this belief system in them. ‘I’m not going to sit by and let you bring this BS up at my dinner table.’” He emphasized how critical it is to be “really vigilant about it” and not let even “little” comments slip by. Instead, he suggested making every derogatory statement about Black people, Jewish people, or other targeted communities “a learning opportunity about why you will not let them perpetuate that evil.” But at the same time, because most young people who become radicalized have “low self-esteem,” he also emphasized that it is important to “[l]ove them through it,” “[t]ell them how great they are, and build up their self esteem.”²³⁰

The experts on extremism who spoke at the listening sessions also encouraged parents, educators, and young people not to be afraid to get professional help, report to the school safety team, or – if they have concerns the person being radicalized may engage in criminal activity or violence – report to law enforcement. As Jenny Presswalla explained:

*[W]hat those people need is help. And so when you reach out, think about it as if, “I’m not going to get my friend in trouble. I’m going to reach out and get help . . . for this person because they’re suffering, likely, in some way, and they need that assistance.”*²³¹

6. Equip non-white youth and adults with resources and support systems for coping with white supremacy.

Exposure to white supremacy—from microaggressions to violence—is traumatic.²³² And it is chronic.²³³ The mental health experts who spoke at the listening sessions emphasized that those who are impacted need support, and they need that support from people who understand the accumulated impact of chronic exposure.²³⁴ The experts were clear that the mental health impact of microaggressions on those who experience them should not be minimized.²³⁵ It is especially important that educators and others interacting with children realize the profound impact that microaggressions can have on the students in their care.²³⁶

Many of the students of color who spoke at the listening sessions emphasized the importance of representation, and how critical Black teachers and other teachers of color were in helping them to navigate white supremacy in school.²³⁷ One Latinx/e student shared that the first time she ever had a teacher of color, she was in high school. She said the teacher was instrumental in encouraging her to stay at her elite magnet high school when her experiences with white supremacy led her to doubt herself: “She sat me down and told me I belonged.”²³⁸ As discussed above, many students of color shared how their experiences with white supremacy and racism were routinely dismissed or minimized by white teachers who failed to acknowledge the significance of the incidents.²³⁹ Conversely, the students reported being reaffirmed by teachers of color, but expressed that they had few – if any – teachers of color throughout their k-12 experience.²⁴⁰

Mental health experts also emphasized how critical it is for targets of white supremacy to have an outlet to talk about their experiences.²⁴¹ The students and adults at the listening sessions repeatedly shared the importance of both peer-to-peer support and models or mentors who shared their experiences.²⁴² For example, when asked what resources would be most helpful, one student shared:

*I think that some type of forum or chat room where people . . . the same age group . . . kind of just come together and talk about, you know, the struggles and the things that they all have to go through. . . . I think that could be really helpful just to have a place where, you know, you feel included and you feel heard and you feel seen.*²⁴³

The mental health experts also underscored how critical it is that targets of white supremacy have access to mental health care from providers who understand their experience.²⁴⁴ One student’s experience reflected that point. She shared how, in high school, she felt that she could not talk to any of the guidance counselors at her school, because they could not relate to her experience.²⁴⁵

* * *

The listening sessions on white supremacy underscored the message that the Youth Bias Task

Force delivered to the entire New Jersey community in October 2020. The community, as a whole, must stand against hate:

[T]he State needs to foster a culture in which New Jersey residents view it as a shared responsibility to stand up to hate whenever and wherever we see it, and to teach our children to strive towards a more just and equal society.

We reaffirm and renew that community call to action today. The events of the last several years have only underscored the danger white supremacy poses to our community, the trauma it inflicts, and the urgent need to act.

Resource Guides

The listening sessions once again made abundantly clear the vital role parents, caregivers, and educators play in dismantling white supremacy. It is our hope that parents, caregivers, and educators across the state will unite with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights and Office of the Attorney General to dismantle white supremacy, whenever and wherever we see it. For many in our community, this may mean having difficult conversations with our children for the first time. The guides in this section are intended to assist parents, caregivers, educators, and community members in having these challenging, but critically important conversations and actively implementing policies to combat white supremacists.

[Appendix 1: Recognizing Signs of White Supremacist Radicalization](#) – This guide, prepared by the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, is intended as a resource to help parents, caregivers, educators, and other community members understand possible signs of white supremacist radicalization and become familiar with white supremacist narratives, symbology, terminology, and groups so they can identify early warning signs of radicalization.

[Appendix 2: Youth Mental Health Resources](#) – In recognition of the profound impact white supremacy has on young people’s mental health, the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights has compiled a collection of youth mental health resources.²⁴⁶

[Appendix 3: Resources on White Supremacy and White Supremacist Radicalization for Educators](#) – Educators can play a key role in educating young people about white supremacy and countering white supremacist narratives with truthful and accurate information. This guide identifies resources on discussing white supremacy with children and students.

[Appendix 4: Addressing Bias in K-12 Schools](#) – This packet was developed by the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) and New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) as part of the recommendations of the New Jersey Youth Bias Task Force Report. It is designed to provide a brief plan for addressing bias in schools and to offer additional resources for delving more deeply into bias response.

[Appendix 5: Addressing Bias on Campus](#) – This packet was developed by the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) as part of the recommendations of the New Jersey Youth Bias Task Force Report. It is designed to provide a brief plan for addressing bias on campus and to offer additional resources for delving more deeply into bias response.

Conclusion

Over the last several years, many in our community have been repeatedly traumatized by the acts of white supremacist violence that have become all too common. This report attempts to share the lived experiences of members of our communities whose lives have been impacted by white supremacy.

With this report, the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights and the Office of the Attorney General call upon all New Jersey residents to stand united against hate, actively work to dismantle white supremacy, and to hold ourselves, each other, and our institutions accountable for doing the same.

Endnotes

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- 246 Please note that these resources are not endorsed by DCR, and this document does not constitute an endorsement of any particular organization, person, book, author, article, podcast, training, toolkit, guide, website, talk, webinar, fundraiser, presentation, event, or any other resource. This mental health resource list is not a substitute for seeking medical attention.