

A close-up photograph of Donald Trump, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and blue tie. He has his fists clenched and is looking down with a serious expression. The background is a solid red color.

THE MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION PRESENTS

THE GREAT WHITE HOAX

DONALD TRUMP & THE POLITICS OF RACE & CLASS IN AMERICA

A DOCUMENTARY FEATURING TIM WISE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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A Note on This Guide

This guide is designed to help teachers and screening organizers engage the issues presented in *The Great White Hoax*. It opens with a set of general discussion questions designed to help open up conversation before screening the film, then provides a series of key summary points, discussion questions, and writing assignments for each section of the film.

While the film itself does not contain actual sections with headings on screen, in this guide we have broken the content into thematic sections to make it easier for you to manage and engage the details of the film. (Please note that in the DVD edition of the film, the main menu does include chapters that follow the structure of this guide.)

For each of the sections we've created for this guide, you'll find key points to help you and your students recall specific details during discussions and writing assignments. You'll find discussion questions designed to inspire critical thinking and open-ended conversation about the film's specific arguments. And you'll find writing assignments that require students to do further research and deepen their thinking about some of the major issues raised in the film.

The overall goal of this guide is to help you guide open-ended discussions – and formulate assignments – that remain focused on the actual issues and arguments raised in the film.

Synopsis

In *The Great White Hoax*, anti-racist educator and author Tim Wise explores how American political leaders of both parties have tapped into white anxiety, stoked white grievance, and scapegoated people of color to divide and conquer working class voters and consolidate power. While Wise's primary focus is Donald Trump's race-baiting 2016 campaign for the presidency, he widens his scope to show how Trump's charged rhetoric about African-Americans, Latinos, and Muslims fits within a longstanding historical pattern of racism and racial scapegoating that goes back centuries in American politics.

Ranging from the invention of "whiteness" and the emergence of "divide-and-conquer" politics in the American colonies in the 17th century to the development of the Southern Strategy in the 1960s to the rise of Trumpism today, Wise provides devastating insights into how racism and racial anxiety have shaped American political culture and divided the working class vote for years. At the same time, Wise reminds us how progressive movements in the past struggled against, and in many cases beat back, the same forces of fear and division that now grip the American political landscape, laying out an ultimately positive vision for resistance today.

Tim Wise is among the nation's most prominent anti-racist writers and activists. Wise is the author of *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, which MEF adapted as a film in 2013. His other books include *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama*, and, most recently, *Under the Affluence: Shaming the Poor, Praising the Rich, and Sacrificing the Future of America*. Wise also travels widely to lecture and provide anti-racism trainings, and appears regularly on television to offer political commentary.

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions

To get a discussion going before showing the film, ask students or members of your screening audience any or all of the following questions:

1. In your view, why would American political leaders (of either party) talk in stereotypical or racist ways about certain groups of people?
2. In purely tactical terms, do you think racist stereotypes and racially coded language work to win voters? If so, how? Give some examples. If not, why not?
3. How would you define the term “scapegoat”? Where does this word come from?
4. How would you define the term “racial scapegoat”?
5. Can you think of some examples of racial scapegoating?
6. How would you define “white supremacy”? How about “white privilege”? Is there a difference between the two terms?
7. Do you think white people can be the beneficiaries of “white supremacist” ideas or policies, or enjoy a degree of “white privilege,” without necessarily being a “racist” themselves?
8. Can poor white people who can barely make ends meet nevertheless be characterized as having “white privilege”? If so, how? If not, why not?
9. Do you think it’s politically advantageous to tell a poor white person who’s struggling that they enjoy certain “privileges”?
10. Do you support the right of white supremacists to hold public rallies and marches? Do you draw the line at certain kinds of speech? Or do you uphold the right to free speech for everyone, even those whose views you disdain?

11. How about at universities? Do you think universities should allow self-identified white supremacists, or known political extremists, to speak on their campuses?
12. And when it comes to what kind of speech should be allowed on campus, would you make a distinction between right-wing extremist speech and left-wing extremist speech?
13. How would you define political “extremism” anyway?
14. In the realm of American politics, do you think that white-supremacist attitudes are, by definition, extremist? Or do you think there’s evidence of white-supremacist beliefs in the mainstream of American politics, within more so-called “moderate” political circles?
15. How closely did you follow the presidential election? Do you think that Donald Trump ran a racist, or at least racially themed, campaign? Why or why not?
16. How do you define racism? Do you think it’s a matter of personal prejudice? Something more systemic? Both? Explain your answer.
17. Do you believe that life has improved for people of color in America since the civil rights movement? Explain your answer either way.
18. What are your thoughts about the removal of Confederate flags and monuments?
19. How do you view the current political climate when it comes to issues of race and racism in the United States?
20. Throughout the presidency of Barack Obama, it was a common refrain in right-wing media that Obama had exacerbated racial tensions by engaging in so-called “identity politics.” Do you think the racial climate in America has gotten worse or better since the election of Donald Trump? Either way, explain why you think this is the case.
21. How would you define “identity politics”?

22. Do you think there's such a thing as *white* identity politics? How about white *male* identity politics?
23. Would you say you're more optimistic or pessimistic about the state of race relations in the United States than you were before the election of Donald Trump?

I. Introduction: The Politics of Charlottesville

Key Points

- On August 11, 2017, a two-day protest march and rally began in Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the removal of a statue of General Robert E. Lee.
- The protest was organized and attended by members of several ultra-right, white nationalist, and neo-Nazi groups, including the famed white supremacist leader David Duke, a former Grand Wizard of the KKK and a prominent supporter of Donald Trump's presidential campaign.
- Duke told a reporter that the protest marked “a turning point” for our country, and that his movement was poised to “fulfill the promises of Donald Trump” and “take our country back.”
- On the second day of the protest, which had been marked by violence throughout as white nationalists clashed with anti-racist protestors, a right-wing protestor drove his car into anti-racist demonstrators, killing a young woman and injuring dozens of others.
- President Donald Trump gave a press conference on August 13th in which he blamed the violence in Charlottesville "on many sides."

I. Introduction: The Politics of Charlottesville

Discussion Questions

1. The “Unite the Right” rally was described as a gathering of “white nationalist” groups. How would you define “white nationalism”? How do you think “white nationalism” differs from “nationalism” on its own?
2. According to the news reports featured in the film, what was the stated purpose of the “Unite the Right” rally?
3. In your view, do the slogans that white nationalists chanted at the rally fit with the stated purpose of the rally?
4. In the interview clip shown in the film, how does the former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke connect his support for Donald Trump to the overall aim of this rally?
5. What’s your take on President Trump’s statement that there was an “egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides” in Charlottesville? Why do you think this statement triggered such fierce criticism from across the political spectrum, even from Republicans in his own party?
6. How did Trump’s official response to the murderous terror attack on anti-racist protesters in Charlottesville compare to other statements he’s made about past acts of terror and violence and those who perpetrate them?
7. Given the radical-extremist political views of the perpetrator of the attack in Charlottesville, do you think this incident constituted an act of “terrorism”? Why or why not?

I. Introduction: The Politics of Charlottesville

Assignments

1. The stated purpose of the Unite the Right rally was to oppose the removal of Confederate statues. Research some of the groups that participated in the protest and write up a profile of them, including their mission statements and main agendas. Then explain the main similarities and any differences you notice between the groups. Finally, after researching these groups, talk about whether you accept their claims about why they went to Charlottesville.
2. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are currently more than 900 hate groups operating within the United States. Research these groups online, beginning with [this “hate map”](https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map) from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC): <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>. Then write an analysis of the groups on the SPLC map that marched on Charlottesville.

Start by defining exactly what a hate group is. Come up with your own definition, in your own words, based on how SPLC defines “hate groups” and other definitions you find on other credible online sources (like the FBI). Then summarize the *specific* evidence SPLC gives for why the groups at Charlottesville qualify as “hate groups.” Finally, talk about the beliefs, practices, and political activities that these hate groups share with other hate groups around the country who weren’t in Charlottesville at this specific protest.

3. One of the groups that showed up to protest the neo-Nazis and white nationalists in Charlottesville was Antifa, an anti-fascist organization. Research this group, including its history and mission. And read a wide range of news commentary – both pro and con – about the tactics the group has used to stand up to Nazis and White Nationalists.

Then write up responses to the following questions: In your view, does Antifa meet the standard definition of a hate group? What do you make of the group's tactics? Is there a sense in which mobilizing against fascism can reproduce a fascist mentality or ideology itself? What is fascism anyway?

Then dig a little deeper by responding to these questions: Would you say that the difference between fascism and anti-fascism comes down to the tactics a group uses? Or do you think the major difference – regardless of tactics – comes down to the group's overall point of view, ideology, and purpose?

4. Write a short profile of David Duke. Who is he? What has he done in his public life? What are some of the things he's done over the years to garner national attention? And how and why do you think his views on race line up with his support for Trump's candidacy?
5. Review the three official statements made by President Trump during and after Charlottesville, and write up an analysis of them. You can also look at his Tweets. In your view, what do his statements reveal about his attitude toward the white nationalists and neo-Nazis who marched in Charlottesville? Why do you think his statements triggered such a fierce backlash, even among members of his own party? How did his statements compare to his responses to other violent attacks, both domestic and abroad? And what does his Charlottesville response say about his views on terror and extremism?
6. Write specifically about Trump's condemnation of "violence on many sides" in Charlottesville. In your view, was he right to equate the violence of the white nationalist groups with the violence of the counter-protestors? Who do you hold responsible for the violence that broke out in Charlottesville? Why?

7. Write a paper analyzing a range of public opinion polls taken in the wake of Charlottesville. (A good beginning source for polling is <http://www.realclearpolitics.com>.)

Look carefully at the kinds of questions people were asked about the incident. Summarize how they responded. Then write a few paragraphs explaining what these polling results tell you about racial attitudes in the United States of America.

In your analysis, make sure not to generalize. Note any differences between the opinions of white people vs. people of color, Republicans vs. Democrats, men vs. women, etc.

II. Racial Scapegoating During the 2016 Campaign

Key Points

- Donald Trump's election was greeted with shock by many media commentators, including CNN commentator Van Jones, who interpreted the election results as a “whitelash” against people of color.
- According to anti-racist educator and writer Tim Wise, Trump won by redirecting the very real anger and frustrations of white working-class voters away from the ownership class onto people of color and immigrants.
- In Wise’s view, Trump's repeated mentions of "law and order," his incessant rhetoric about illegal immigration and criminal immigrants, and his constant attacks on Islam worked to stoke the fears of white working-class people and divide them from people of color who are also working class.
- Wise says that the net effect of all of these claims, repeated again and again on the campaign trail, was the basic idea that "darkness equals danger" – a fear-based message about people of color he says has been central to “the larger project of racism in the United States.”
- Wise goes onto detail how Trump came to political prominence as part of the right-wing "birther" movement, which was organized around the baseless claim that President Obama was not born in the U.S. and was therefore ineligible to become President of the United States.
- During the campaign, Wise says, Trump's mobilization of these kinds of racially coded appeals gave legitimacy to the idea that white Americans need protection from people of color, driving a wedge between the two groups.

II. Racial Scapegoating During the 2016 Campaign

Discussion Questions

1. While many people from across the political spectrum expressed shock after Trump's upset victory over Hillary Clinton, CNN commentator Van Jones's observation that Trump's victory represented a "whitelash" placed this sense of shock squarely within the context of racial politics. What do you think the term "whitelash" means? Do you think it's a good description of what happened, based on the number of votes Trump received from white people vs. people of color? When Jones says this "whitelash" was a nightmare for certain people, not the "miracle" so many other people were describing, which people was he talking about? Why?
2. According to Wise, where did Trump assign the blame for the problems of working-class whites? Who didn't he blame?
3. According to Wise, what role did fear and danger play in the appeals Donald Trump made to American voters? Which voters did he seem to be addressing his message to?
4. What is "birtherism," and what was the "birther movement"? How did Trump tap into this movement and use birtherism to galvanize support for his presidential run?
5. According to Wise, what ultimate role did race-based appeals play in Trump's political rise and ultimate victory?

II. Racial Scapegoating During the 2016 Campaign

Assignments

1. Van Jones coined the term “whitelash” to describe how white anger and resentment brought Donald Trump to power. For some context on where Jones is coming from, [watch this exchange](http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video/van-jones-mary-matalin-heated-exchange-race-2016-43508020) he had with conservative commentator Mary Matalin:
<http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video/van-jones-mary-matalin-heated-exchange-race-2016-43508020>

Then write a paper explaining whether you agree or disagree with Matalin’s calling Jones “a racial polemicist”? Do you think Van Jones’s comment was divisive? Why or why not?

2. Research the economic status of the white working class compared to people of color. Then write up responses to the following questions: How has each group fared in the last eight years under President Obama? How has the status of the top income groups changed over the same period? Does the data support Wise’s assertion that the white working class’s frustrations and anger have been misdirected by Trump? Be sure to make reference to the film to help develop your responses.
3. Research arguments for and against Trump’s proposal to “build a wall” on the southern border. Then write responses to these questions: What are the most common arguments conservative politicians and commentators have made in support of a southern border wall? Do the facts support the claim made in the film, by Fox News’s Sean Hannity, that a wall will prevent competition from illegal immigrants for 95 million U.S. workers? Is there a correlation between U.S. unemployment and illegal immigration that can be solved by building a wall? Provide research data to support your responses.

4. Research the birther movement, its origins, and President Trump's role in spreading its views. A good place to start is The New York Times, which featured a number of stories and opinion pieces as the movement took hold. But be sure to research birtherism on right-wing websites as well, including sources like Breitbart (<http://www.breitbart.com>) and Info Wars (<http://www.infowars.com>). After conducting your research, write a paper describing each of the following:
 - a. The mentality behind this movement.
 - b. Its major claims and methods.
 - c. The response from credible journalists and non-partisan fact-checking organizations like Politifact. (<http://www.politifact.com/>)
 - d. Why you think this movement had such cultural traction.

III. Trumpism & Political Norms

Key Points

- Over the course of the 2016 campaign, a number of prominent Republicans expressed outrage over Donald Trump's use of racial scapegoating.
- In addition, mainstream media commentators and political leaders of both parties repeatedly made the claim that Trump's use of racial scapegoating broke with the values of the Republican Party and what it means to be a true conservative.
- But according to Wise, this anti-Trump outrage ignored the reality that conservative politicians (of both parties) have been using racial scapegoating for generations to divide and conquer white working-class voters and consolidate political power.
- Wise details how President Richard Nixon, with his so-called "Southern Strategy, used racially coded language in the 1960s to divide white working-class and blue-collar voters from people of color.
- He goes on to argue that Nixon's law-and-order policies reinforced white fears of urban blacks and were used to justify cracking down on black people in urban areas.
- Wise also traces the evolution of so-called "dog whistle" politics in the wake of the gains of the civil rights movement – showing how conservative politicians began to abandon their explicitly racist language for a kind of racial code that allowed them to tap into white anxiety and resentment in more subtle ways.
- Lee Atwater, one of the nation's most prominent Republican political consultants in the 1980s and 90s, was recorded on tape in 1981 acknowledging that he and other operatives had advised conservative politicians to talk about things like forced busing, welfare, and law and order to sell white people on policies that would disproportionately hurt blacks.

- According to Wise, the ultimate goal of using this kind of racially coded language was to signal to white people that people of color were their enemy, even if only in financial terms.
- An excerpt from a White House tape recorded in 1971 supports Wise's view. In the tape, President Nixon instructs an aide to encourage Republicans and Southern Democrats to talk to blue collar white voters about the growing problem of lazy welfare recipients in inner cities.
- Likewise, a 1972 campaign ad put out by "Democrats for Nixon" features a narrator talking about how blue-collar Americans will have to foot the bill for wasteful increases in welfare spending while the camera focuses on a white construction worker in a hard hat.
- This strategy, known today as "The Southern Strategy" because it was designed to win the votes of blue-collar Democrats in the South, worked to create the perception that government is in the service of people of color, not the white working class.
- As a result, anti-government attitudes began to take hold among growing numbers of blue-collar white voters – even though government programs had disproportionately benefitted working-class white people over time, and even though millions of white working-class voters *still* relied on government programs.
- Throughout the 1970s and '80s, despite all factual evidence to the contrary, images of a runaway federal government that was taxing hard-working white people to subsidize lazy, undeserving people of color became a standard Republican trope.
- In his first bid for the presidency in 1976, Ronald Reagan reinforced these stereotypes. On the campaign trail, Reagan was quoted telling a story about a "welfare queen and a Cadillac" and "strapping young bucks" (which was clear code for black men) "buying T-Bone steaks with food stamps."

- Wise then points out that Reagan began his successful campaign for president in 1980 in Philadelphia, Mississippi – a place recognized by most Americans as the site of the brutal 1964 murder of three civil rights workers during the Mississippi Freedom Summer campaign to register black voters.
- Wise concludes this part of his discussion by reminding us that Ronald Reagan’s campaign slogan in 1980 was “Let’s Make America Great Again,” the very slogan Donald Trump would make famous more than 30 years later.

III. Trumpism & Political Norms

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Tim Wise take issue with prominent Republicans who claimed Donald Trump's racist rhetoric was unacceptable and attempted to distance themselves from him?
2. What was the "Southern Strategy"? And how did Richard Nixon use it to garner white votes and win the presidency?
3. The Southern Strategy and terms like "dog-whistle politics" and "racially coded language" usually go hand in hand. What do you think the term "dog-whistle politics" means? Why do you think that's the term that's used to describe this practice? How about "racial code"? How would you define that?
4. Do you agree that white politicians are often talking about race, and tapping into white racial anxiety, without actually *explicitly* talking about race? Give some examples.
5. According to Tim Wise, when white politicians talk to white voters about "law and order," what does this signify to white voters? How did this "law-and-order" rhetoric translate into policy under Nixon?
6. What are some other examples of racial "dog-whistles" that white politicians have used with white audiences to communicate that black and brown people are the source of their problems?
7. Who was Lee Atwater, and why were the remarks he made about the Southern Strategy on tape so significant?
8. Summarize the conversation between President Nixon and his aide Charles Colson in the White House tape that's played in the film. What are they saying about blue-collar voters and how does it relate to Wise's overall discussion of the Southern Strategy?

9. The film features a campaign ad that ends with the tagline “Democrats for Nixon.” What was the message of this ad? What was it saying? In what ways do you think it was designed to speak to Democrats? Do you think it was targeted at *all* Democrats? Or just a *certain segment* of Democrats? If the latter, which ones?
10. In your view, does the “Democrats for Nixon” ad back up Wise’s assertion that conservatives have been using racial dog whistles for decades? If so, how? If not, why not?
11. According to Wise, why were federal government programs far more popular with white working-class voters in the 1930s and ‘40s? What happened to popular support for these programs in later decades? And why did white opinion change, according to Wise?
12. What kinds of racial stereotypes did Ronald Reagan employ on the campaign trail in his first bid for the presidency in 1976? Assuming this was a deliberate political strategy, what do you think it was designed to accomplish? Do you think rhetoric like this can be effective? If so, how and why?
13. What was significant about the location Ronald Reagan chose to launch his winning 1980 campaign for president? Do you think it’s possible the choice of this location was merely a coincidence? What kind of message do you think it sent to white Southern voters? How about to black voters, in the South and North?
14. What was Reagan’s campaign slogan? And how does it support Wise’s point about current conservative political strategies?

III. Trumpism & Political Norms

Assignments

1. Research the platforms of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, and write a short paper comparing and contrasting them. Be sure to summarize each of the following:
 - a) The major policy differences you find.
 - b) Any differences you detect in each party's view toward the federal government.
 - c) Any differences in their approach to race relations in the United States.
 - d) Any basic differences you detect in their overall view of democracy, freedom, and justice.
2. Research the "Dixiecrats." Then write a short paper explaining each of the following:
 - a) Who, or what, the Dixiecrats were.
 - b) What they stood for.
 - c) How and why they broke with other political groups.
 - d) How and why they ended up forming an alliance with certain Republican politicians.
 - e) How Richard Nixon's Southern Strategy aligned with Dixiecrat ideology to win southern votes.
3. Read Richard Nixon's presidential nomination [acceptance speech](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968) at the Republican National Convention in August 8, 1968, especially the portions where he talks about "law and order" and welfare. You can find the speech here:
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968>

Write a paper examining how Nixon framed these issues, how it fit with the Southern Strategy, and how it played with white working-class voters. Be sure to research and discuss what was going on in the larger culture at the time, especially with race relations.

4. A longer version of the Nixon campaign ad shown in the film ends with the tagline: “This time vote like your whole world depended on it. Nixon.” What message do you think Nixon was trying to convey to voters with this tagline? Which voters did he seem to be targeting with this ad? Do you see similarities between the basic message of this ad and the kinds of appeals Trump made throughout his campaign?
5. Watch the documentary “Boogey Man: The Lee Atwater Story” and write a paper about the tactics Atwater pioneered to target white working-class voters. Use Tim Wise’s analysis in *The Great White Hoax* to support your points and deepen your analysis of the film.
6. Research the concept of “states’ rights,” and write a paper explaining each of the following:
 - a. What this term actually refers to.
 - b. Why conservatives have rallied around the idea of states’ rights for decades.
 - c. How the idea of states’ rights relates to American race relations and fits within the history of the so-called Southern Strategy.

A good place to start your research is [this article](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history_lesson/2007/11/dogwhistling_dixie.html) from Slate magazine:

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history_lesson/2007/11/dogwhistling_dixie.html

7. Wise says that government programs were popular with white Americans during the Depression and through WWII. Research some of the more popular programs during the New Deal period, paying particular attention to whether people of color had equal access to these benefits. Then research public opinion about federal government programs between the 1930s and today. Note any changes in attitudes toward federal spending, and make note of any differences over time between the attitudes of white people and people of color toward federal government programs. Write a paper summarizing all of your findings, and explaining whether your research supports Wise’s argument that racial attitudes have shaped white attitudes toward federal programs and the federal government over time.

8. When Ronald Reagan announced his run for the presidency in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 1980, he promised to "restore to states and local governments the power that properly belongs to them." In light of the notorious hate crime that occurred in Philadelphia, Mississippi, just a decade and half earlier, do you think this sentence may have registered in different ways to different people depending on their race? Write a paper imagining how two different groups of Southern people, one white and one African-American, might interpret this sentence differently.
9. Research a political operative named Roger Stone, and write a paper examining his work advising conservative politicians over the decades, especially his work helping to shape their appeals to white working-class voters. Then analyze Stone's political tactics in light of Wise's overall arguments in *The Great White Hoax*. Make sure your research goes back to Stone's earliest campaign work and runs up to his most recent work. To supplement your online research and get a better sense of what Stone is all about, check out the new documentary *Get Me Roger Stone*, and also be sure to [read his Twitter feed \(https://twitter.com/RogerJStoneJr\)](https://twitter.com/RogerJStoneJr).

IV. A Brief History of Divide & Conquer Politics

Key Points

- Wise argues that while Donald Trump may not be as subtle as some of the conservative politicians that came before him, his use of racial scapegoats to divide white working-class people from people of color is nothing new, and in fact goes way back in American history.
- Wise traces these divide-and-conquer tactics back to Bacon's Rebellion in the Virginia Colony in 1676, which involved poor blacks uniting with poor whites to challenge the repressive and exploitative practices of the English aristocracy.
- In the wake of that rebellion and others in the 17th century, the idea of “the white race” first started to come into usage – coined by elites who had a direct interest in distinguishing and dividing poor and working-class whites from poor, working people of color.
- Wise goes on to discuss how, over time, colonial aristocrats gradually granted poor Europeans a few rights, abolished white indentured servitude, and gave them jobs on the slave patrol – all in order to give them a stake in the system of white supremacy.
- Poor whites weren't granted any real power or wealth, Wise says, but elites *did* provide them with what WEB Dubois called "the psychological wage of whiteness" – a limited amount of power that enabled them to consider themselves superior to the black people whose lives they now controlled.
- According to Wise, this strategy of promoting white supremacy ultimately paid off when poor white Europeans stopped rebelling in concert with poor blacks and started to believe that their enemies were black and brown rather than rich and white.

- This use of whiteness to "divide and conquer" continued during the Civil War era, when Confederate elites broke away from the United States in order to maintain their interest in slave property, and convinced poor white people to fight for them by spreading the myth that if slaves were freed, they would take white people's jobs.
- As Wise points out, the irony of this claim was that working class white people were *also* harmed by the system of enslavement and white supremacy because the system depended on the unpaid labor of slaves, which resulted in whites' wages being bid downward.
- Wise then traces the evolution of divide-and-conquer politics to the rise of the labor union movement, which saw unions refusing to integrate because they believed uniting with Chinese, black, or Mexican workers would reduce the professionalism of their craft.
- The result of these segregation practices was that unions were far smaller than they would have been, undermining their bargaining power with elites.
- Wise then brings this phenomenon up to the present, arguing that Trump's repeated attacks on immigration are simply another way to divide and conquer working people from one another.
- He argues that the idea of building a wall in order to protect blue collar American jobs actually limits the ability of working people to unite with each other across race and ethnicity to fight for better working conditions and wages, even as capital and goods still transgress borders.
- According to Wise, one of the main reasons racial scapegoating works is because it offers a quick fix to the problems of disaffected white people.
- In this way, he says, there's a parallel between the opioid crisis that's now ravaging white working-class populations, especially in rural areas, and the popularity of Trump with these same people.

- Wise's claim is borne out by post-election data showing that the communities with the highest rate of opioid addiction also had the highest percentage of support for Donald Trump.
- According to Penn State University sociologist Shannon Monnat, this correlation is rooted in the broad economic distresses and job losses that have been suffered in these counties.

IV. A Brief History of Divide & Conquer Politics

Discussion Questions

1. In the film, Wise says that Donald Trump “may be more of a bull horn” than a “dog-whistle” when it comes to his use of racial scapegoating, but that it basically amounts to the same thing. What does he mean by this?
2. How does Wise situate Trumpism within the context of American history?
3. What was Bacon’s Rebellion? What lesson did the white elite learn from it? Why does Wise use it as a foundational example of racial scapegoating in American history?
4. What does Wise mean when he says the term “whiteness” first developed in the colonial period in response to poor and working-class threats to aristocratic elites? If there was no idea of “whiteness” prior to then, how were white people referred to?
5. What did W.E.B. Dubois mean by “the psychological wage of whiteness”? In what sense can something psychological function as a “wage”?
6. Explain how the politics of “divide and conquer” worked during the Civil War and continued into the 20th century during the rise of the labor union movement.
7. According to Wise, how is Trump’s focus on immigration and his promise to build a southern border wall consistent with policies in the past that have hurt, rather than helped, the white working class?
8. How does the film explain why communities with the highest rates of opioid addiction also had the highest levels of support for Donald Trump?
9. Why does Wise say Donald Trump “functions like a walking, talking opioid”?

IV. A Brief History of Divide & Conquer Politics

Assignments

1. During Bacon's Rebellion, poor whites who were indentured servants joined together with African slaves to fight against the Virginia aristocracy, united by their class position. Historians have pointed to this uprising as one of several events in early American history that helped shaped the future direction of the colonies. Research the Virginia Slave Code and other laws that were pivotal in creating the economic, legal, and social foundation of the United States.
2. Use W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "the psychological wage of whiteness" as a jumping off point to study white privilege in all its many forms. Pick one author who has written on whiteness and white privilege to explore how it distorts and blinds people to racism.
3. Research the history of race relations within the U.S. labor union movement, and write a paper investigating Wise's claim that the racist attitudes and practices of white labor leaders made it more difficult for unions to fight for higher wages and better working conditions.
4. Wise provides a number of examples of racial scapegoating being used to divide and conquer working class voters. Do some research into this phenomenon on your own, and write up a description and analysis of three or four additional examples of racial scapegoating from the past and/or present. Make sure you choose examples that aren't mentioned in the film, and make sure you clearly define what you mean by "divide-and-conquer politics" before examining your specific cases.

V. Trumpism & White Cultural Anxiety

Key Points

- After the election, most politicians and pundits argued that economic anxiety was the primary reason for Donald Trump's upset victory.
- Wise argues that while economic issues clearly did play a role in Trump's victory, racial attitudes also played a central role.
- If the main reason people voted for Trump was because they were struggling economically, Wise asks, then why did the overwhelming majority of black and brown voters, who are far worse off economically than whites, vote *against* him?
- Several months after the election, a number of surveys identified "cultural anxiety," not economic anxiety, as the primary reason so many white people voted for Donald Trump.
- The idea that "we are losing our country," and that the country has gotten worse since the 1950s, was by far the most common belief of Trump voters.
- Wise argues that while pluralism and the cultural changes we've seen since the 1950s have benefited people of color, women, and LGBTQ people, they've been viewed and experienced as a *loss* by large majorities of white men and a significant majority of white women.
- According to Wise, it is precisely this sense of cultural loss that Donald Trump – and Reagan before him – were deliberately tapping into with their identical campaign slogan "Make America Great Again."
- Wise goes on to show how the rise of the Tea Party – with its slogan "Let's Take Back Our Country" – tapped into the same sense of white cultural anxiety and resentment during the Obama years.

- The idea that white cultural anxiety – and, at times, outright racism – played a role in Trump’s victory was supported by polls that found that Trump supporters were far more likely to believe the falsehoods that President Obama was secretly a Muslim, wasn’t born in America, and therefore wasn’t a legitimate president.

V. Trumpism & White Cultural Anxiety

Discussion Questions

1. According to most post-election commentary, what was the primary reason for Donald Trump's victory and Hillary Clinton's failure to win the votes of struggling blue-collar and working-class voters?
2. What was the racial breakdown of Trump voters? Do these numbers support mainstream commentary about why Trump won?
3. According to Wise, why can't we talk about economic anxiety without talking about race? How are the two intertwined? Do you agree with him?
4. According to surveys, what role did "cultural anxiety" play in Trump's victory? What is cultural anxiety, anyway? And how does it relate to, and differ from, economic anxiety?
5. Why does Wise say that the class position of a voter is insufficient to explain support for Trump?
6. How does Wise explain Trump voters' sense that the country has gotten worse since the 1950s? Why do Trump voters have such a negative outlook about the country?
7. What does Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," signify to his supporters? How does Wise relate it to the Tea Party's slogan "Take Our Country Back"?
8. According to Wise, how and why can "Take Our Country Back" be read as a racially coded term? Do you agree or disagree with this?
9. How does Wise make sense of the fact that although people of color were hit worse by the economic recession that gave rise to the Tea Party, it was white people who formed the movement?

10. Wise says that white voters who turned to Trump because they were experiencing economic anxiety, cultural loss, and an overall sense of “de-centering” are not necessarily racist in the old-school sense of the KKK – but still voted for him based on their racial identity and their attitudes toward people of color. What distinction is he making here? Do you agree with him? Do you feel there are different degrees of racism, as he seems to imply?
11. Why does Wise talk about the birther movement? How does this fit with his overall argument about the primary role that racism, and white anxiety and grievance, played in this election?

V. Trumpism & White Cultural Anxiety

Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the arguments made in these two articles about Trump voters:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/white-working-class-trump-cultural-anxiety/525771/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/opinion/the-democratic-party-is-in-worse-shape-than-you-thought.html>

In your view, which of these two pieces makes a more convincing case for why so many whites voted for Donald Trump? Are you more convinced by economic or cultural arguments to explain the Democratic Party's failure to capture white votes?

2. Members of the Tea Party movement often cited their focus on taxes and government spending as evidence that they weren't driven by racism, white privilege, or resentment toward the nation's first black president. Write a paper refuting – or defending – this common Tea Party argument. Use specific examples from *Great White Hoax*, and your own research into the Southern Strategy, to support your argument.
3. Research the actual meaning of “racism,” and write a paper examining Tim Wise's claim that people can harbor racist attitudes without necessarily being in league with white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Nazis, and the KKK.

VI. Trumpism & The Confederate Flag Debate

Key Points

- Donald Trump's rise as a candidate coincided with an increasingly high-profile movement of Southern whites protesting the removal of Confederate memorials in cities around the country.
- Wise argues that many of the people who have been fighting to preserve Confederate memorials see their removal as “an attack on whiteness itself.”
- And he suggests that this attitude, which is based on a sense of cultural loss and a nostalgic desire for a simpler time before civil rights, feminism, and pluralism is squarely in line with overall white support for Donald Trump – even beyond the South.

VI. Trumpism & The Confederate Flag Debate

Discussion Questions

1. What connections does Wise see between the movement to protect Confederate memorials and the Trump campaign and presidency?
2. Why does Wise say that people who are fighting to preserve Confederate memorials see their removal as “an attack on whiteness itself?”
3. The film features a man from the Sons of Confederate Veterans comparing the removal of confederate statues and flags to what happened when “Hitler took the history away from the Jews.” What point do you think this man is trying to make? What do you make of his argument? Do you agree with him that these two things are comparable? Why or why not?
4. What did the Confederacy stand for? Why does Wise think that Trump’s rhetoric and the mentality behind it are in many ways identical to the ideas of the Confederacy?

VI. Trumpism & The Confederate Flag Debate

Assignments

1. Read the Mississippi Declaration of Secession in its entirety, and do the same with three or four other declarations from states that seceded from the union. As you read through these documents, make note of any common themes and arguments you find. Then write a paper in response to this question: 1) Why did the Confederate states wage war against the Union in the Civil War? Pay particular attention to the role states' rights and slavery played in the justifications given by these states for secession.
2. Research one of the groups from the South that have made the preservation of the Confederate flag and monuments their cause. Write a profile of the group. Do you think their defense of the flag and these monuments qualifies as "racist" or is in any way informed by white supremacist attitudes? Explain why or why not.
3. Write a position paper on the debate surrounding the removal of Confederate flags and monuments. Explain whether you think they should come down or be left in place, being sure to cite arguments from both sides as you explain and defend your position.

VII. A Perfect Storm of White Male Anxiety

Key Points

- While a majority of white women voted for Donald Trump, the rate was far higher for white men.
- According to Wise, Trump's lopsided performance with white men reveals how whiteness intersects with gender in crucial ways.
- Wise argues that while being white has always come with certain expectations, being a white *man* has especially come with certain expectations.
- The white men in rust belt towns who voted for Trump may have been feeling a sense of economic dislocation, Wise says, but it's also crucial to remember that their resentment against the system is informed by an *expectation* of upward mobility that people of color have never had.
- Wise also notes that men's expectations have been heightened over time by an economy that has been centered around modes of production that have played to men's physical strength.
- According to Wise, it is precisely because white men throughout history have been able to expect these advantages that they have had a harder time responding to a changing economy than women and people of color.
- As jobs have been shipped overseas, as we've transitioned from an industrial economy to an information and service economy, and as traditional men's work has disappeared, white men's expectations have taken a severe hit, making them more susceptible to politicians who frame change as a form of deterioration and promise to restore things to the way they were.
- This sense of anxiety and dislocation and dashed expectations among white men has only been exacerbated by the seismic cultural changes that have resulted since the 1960s as people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and non-Christians have fought for and achieved greater recognition and equality.

- As Wise puts it, “The combination of cultural change, along with global economic shifts, along with the election of the first black president in 2008, along with a thoroughly multicultural popular culture -- all of these things have combined to create a sort of perfect storm of white *male* anxiety.”
- The result, he says, is the emergence of politicians like Donald Trump who not only channel *white* anxiety and anger, but also – and especially – white *male* anxiety and anger.
- Wise details how Trump performed a kind of throwback manhood designed to appeal to disaffected white men throughout the campaign – brutally emasculating his male opponents and modeling a puffed-up, tough-guy version of traditional masculinity.
- Similarly, Trump framed the forces of “political correctness” as an attempt to undermine strong leadership and roll back traditional ideals of a kind of mythical straight-shooting white manhood.
- Wise goes on to observe that Trump did all of this while modeling a traditional alpha-heterosexual male ideal of sexual potency and conquest that stood in stark contrast with the image conservatives painted of Barack Obama as a cerebral, feckless, impotent, and soft leader with a weakness for mom jeans.

VII. A Perfect Storm of White Male Anxiety

Discussion Questions

1. In Wise's view, how does whiteness intersect with gender?
2. According to Wise, in what ways does being a white man in America come with more expectations than simply being white? What does he mean by "expectations"?
3. How have traditional notions of masculinity been affected by changes in the economy and labor force, according to Wise?
4. Why does Wise say people of color – including men of color – have responded differently to changes in the economy? In your view, does this contrast help explain the huge racial disparity among men who voted for Trump?
5. In Wise's view, what other changes, beyond the economy, have worked to create "a perfect storm" of white male anxiety?
6. Do you agree with Wise that Trump's rhetoric on the campaign trail tapped into this growing sense of white male anxiety? What are some examples he gives? Can you think of others?
7. According to Wise, Trump modeled a certain definition of what a "real man" is. Based on the examples in the film, what are the key traits of a "real man" that Trump embodied and acted out?
8. What is Trump's problem with so-called political correctness? How does it relate to Wise's larger point about manhood?
9. What sets Trump apart from other candidates according to Mike Pence?
10. When Fox News moderator Megyn Kelly questioned Trump about sexist and misogynistic comments he had made in the past, how did he defend himself? What do you think of this defense?

11. What was the reaction of most Trump supporters when he was caught on tape glamorizing and making light of sexual assault? What's your own take on what these supporters had to say about this?
12. According to commentary in the film, what defines a so-called "alpha-male" as embodied by Donald Trump? And how, exactly, does this contrast with a supposedly "beta-male" like Barack Obama? What do you make of these terms? Do you think our ideas about manhood play a role in shaping our perceptions of political leaders, policies, and issues?

VII. A Perfect Storm of White Male Anxiety

Assignments

1. Do some online research about white working-class and blue-collar voters and how they responded to Donald Trump over the course of the 2016 presidential campaign. Try to find articles that give voice to these voters, and videos that feature focus groups with them. Then write a paper exploring the political attitudes of these voters in light of final polling results that showed that white working-class and blue-collar *men* were far more likely to vote for Trump than white women and men and women of color. In your view, what accounts for these differences in voting patterns? In your research, as you read and listened to the voices of these voters, were there any clues that working-class *white* men would be far more likely to vote for Trump than working-class men and women of color, and even working-class white women? In your view, how – and especially *why* – did gender combine with race and class to ignite Trump’s key base of support?
2. The writer Chauncey DeVega has called Donald Trump a “professional white victimologist.” Read [this interview](#) with DeVega and write a paper summarizing his basic analysis of how and why Trump mined white men’s sense of victimhood to win the presidency and preserve the power of rich white men like himself. Then, after summarizing his main ideas, give your own take on DeVega’s analysis. Do you agree or disagree that Donald Trump has played on white men’s sense of “victimhood”? You can find the interview here:
<https://www.alternet.org/election-2016/donald-trump-leading-cult-toxic-white-masculinity-may-destroy-our-institutions-and>
3. Read the article [“White People Think Racism Is Getting Worse. Against White People”](#) in the Washington Post, and write a paper relating the main ideas of the piece to the overall arguments presented in *The Great White Hoax*. You can find the article here:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/21/white-people-think-racism-is-getting-worse-against-white-people/?utm_term=.3d0120f3edb5

4. Tim Wise talks about how white men harbor greater resentment toward our changing economic landscape than other groups. Write a paper summarizing Wise’s basic argument here about how gender and race intersect.

To help deepen your analysis, check out the data on economic inequality from the Economic Policy Institute here:

<https://inequality.org/facts/>.

And read this story about white anxiety in the face of multiculturalism and pluralism here:

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/white-trump-supporters-fear-minority/story?id=43229203>

5. Write a paper summarizing Tim Wise’s basic argument about the kind of manhood Trump modeled throughout the campaign. Then explain why you think his performance of this kind of manhood seemed to appeal to so many white men, in particular – but also a majority of white *women*.
6. Research the history and evolution of the term “political correctness,” and write a paper about how Donald Trump and others on the right have repeatedly attacked the concept to rally their supporters. After establishing what the term means, where it comes from, and how it’s been used, be sure to include your own take on debates about political correctness – especially on college campuses.

VIII. Learning from the Past

Key Points

- Throughout American history, people have pushed back against the politics of racial scapegoating.
- According to Wise, there's no fundamental reason why people can't push back against racial scapegoating today.
- People of color have been organizing and leading this struggle against racism and injustice for years, and today they're doing so in groups like Black Lives Matter and Black Youth Project 100.
- But, ultimately, Wise says, we're not likely to achieve a more socially just society until more white people join the struggle and directly challenge white privilege and white supremacy.
- Wise is careful to say that people of color have led the struggle against racism for centuries, and will *continue* to lead this struggle – but that white people have to be there as well, fighting alongside them as allies.
- Since the election, there have been signs this is happening, as hundreds of thousands of people have shown up at multiple mass protests to push back against Trumpism and the politics of racial scapegoating.
- In addition, groups like Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), a white, anti-racist group with 125 chapters around the U.S., have been going into white communities and having conversations about police brutality aimed at people of color.
- In the end, Wise says, white people looking for ways to make change can take strength from the examples of people of color in the past who fought far greater forms of racism, repression, and injustice than what we see today.

VIII. Learning from the Past

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Wise see reason for optimism despite rising levels of intolerance, racism, and white nationalism since Trump's election?
2. What lessons does Wise say we can we learn from the past?
3. What signs of hope does Wise find amidst the white backlash that put Donald Trump in the White House? What are some of the groups that Wise names?
4. According to Wise, what role should white people play in the fight against racism and white supremacy?
5. What does Wise say we can all learn from the newly opened National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington DC?
6. Ultimately, what does Wise think of Donald Trump and the movement that brought him to power?