



(Photo credit: AP/Jae C. Hong)

The Media Education Foundation Presents

THE GREAT WHITE HOAX

Donald Trump & The Politics of Race & Class in America

A Documentary Featuring Tim Wise

RT: 72 min

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Logline: *The Great White Hoax* explores Donald Trump's race-baiting campaign for the presidency in 2016 as part of a longer-range pattern of U.S. political leaders scapegoating people of color and exploiting cultural anxieties to divide and conquer working class Americans and shore up the white vote.

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.

FILMMAKER STATEMENT

In 2013, we were honored to work with Tim Wise on a video adaptation of his highly acclaimed memoir *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. In that documentary, we looked at the innumerable ways that white privilege and the legacy of institutional racism can distort the personal perceptions and political attitudes of white people in ways they're often not even aware of. As we watched the 2016 presidential election play out, and saw the stunningly high percentages of white people of all class backgrounds who voted for Donald Trump despite his flagrantly race-baiting campaign, the insights Wise offered in that video seemed more relevant than ever. His insights only became more urgent when election post-mortems from pundits and politicians started rolling in and making the claim that economic anxieties, not racial anxieties, were the ultimate key to Trump's victory.

While it seemed clear that economic stress and dislocation were major factors in driving working class voters to Trump, there was still the glaring fact that the most economically stressed voters in the country – people of color – voted overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton. And there was also the fact that the median income of Trump supporters was well above \$70,000 a year. Clearly, economic anxiety, while obviously important to any understanding of the rise of Trumpism, was not enough to explain what happened.

To dig deeper and tease out the intersections of class, race, and even gender that drove white support for Trump, we decided to reach out to Wise and collaborate with him on another video. The result of that collaboration is *The Great White Hoax*, Wise's extended meditation on the rise of Trumpism, the resurgence of white nationalism, and the myriad ways that white (especially white *male*) anxiety and resentment have been re-shaping American political culture for decades.

In *The Great White Hoax*, Wise not only accounts for the economic stresses that emboldened Trump with white working-class voters; he also forces us to confront the undeniable and much more uncomfortable reality that race, racism, and white anxiety played a decisive role as well. In direct contrast to mainstream discussions about identity politics that tend to center on people of color, Wise shows us how Trump and his operatives deliberately exploited white people's fears of a changing culture to score political points and consolidate power.

But at the same time, he's careful to remind us that the divisive forces that animate Trumpism are anything but new. Digging deep into history, Wise reads the politics of racial scapegoating that Trump employed throughout the campaign as the culmination of a decades-long effort by conservative politicians – of both parties – to tap into racial anxiety to shore up the white vote and win over blue-collar white voters who had traditionally voted Democratic.

In the end, the analysis Tim Wise provides in *The Great White Hoax* not only illuminates the dark, often hidden, politics of racial scapegoating. It also offers a positive vision for how to build on past resistance movements and keep the ongoing struggle against white supremacy alive moving forward. At this pivotal moment in the history of American politics and U.S. race relations, we couldn't be more thrilled to once again team up with the amazing Tim Wise.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

THE MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION (MEF) produces and distributes documentaries about the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media. Since its founding by Sut Jhally in 1991, MEF has produced and distributed scores of documentary videos on a range of subjects, from media coverage of the Iraq war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to the cultural influence of advertising and the public relations industry, to the way commercial media narratives shape public attitudes about race, class, gender, and sexuality. In 2013, MEF collaborated with Tim Wise on the documentary *White Like Me*, an adaptation of his highly acclaimed memoir of the same title.

TIM WISE, who was once described by scholar and philosopher Cornel West as “a vanilla brother in the tradition of [abolitionist] John Brown,” is among the nation's most prominent antiracist essayists and educators. He has spent the past 25 years speaking to audiences in all 50 states, on over 1,000 college and high school campuses, at hundreds of professional and academic conferences, and to community groups across the nation. He has also lectured internationally, and has trained corporate, government, law enforcement, and medical industry professionals on methods for dismantling racism in their institutions.

Wise's antiracism work traces back to his days as a college activist in the 1980s, fighting for divestment from (and economic sanctions against) apartheid South Africa. After graduation, he threw himself into social justice efforts full-time, as a Youth Coordinator and Associate Director of the Louisiana Coalition Against Racism and Nazism: the largest of the many groups organized in the early 1990s to defeat the political candidacies of white supremacist and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke. From there, he became a community organizer in New Orleans' public housing, and a policy analyst for a children's advocacy group focused on combatting poverty and economic inequity. He has served as an adjunct professor at the Smith College School of Social

Work, in Northampton, MA., and from 1999-2003 was an advisor to the Fisk University Race Relations Institute in Nashville, TN.

Wise is the author of several books, including his highly acclaimed memoir, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, which the Media Education Foundation adapted as a documentary video 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*. In addition, his essays have appeared on Alternet, Salon, Huffington Post, Counterpunch, Black Commentator, BK Nation, Z Magazine and The Root, which recently named Wise one of the “8 Wokest White People We Know.” Wise also appeared alongside legendary scholar and activist Angela Davis in the 2011 documentary *Vocabulary of Change*, and has made dozens of TV and radio appearances, including on CNN, MSNBC, NPR, ABC’s 20/20, and CBS’s 48 Hours. Wise graduated from Tulane University in 1990 and received antiracism training from the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, in New Orleans.

JEREMY EARP (director, editor) has directed, co-directed, and/or co-written several documentaries for the Media Education Foundation, including *Hijacking Catastrophe: 9/11, Fear & the Selling of American Empire* (2004); *War Made Easy: How Presidents & Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* (2007); *Blood & Oil* (2008); *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood* (2008); *The Mean World Syndrome: Media, Violence & the Cultivation of Fear* (2010); *Not Just a Game: Power, Politics & American Sports* (2010); *This Land is Our Land: The Fight to Reclaim the Commons* (2010); *The Purity Myth: The Virginity Movement’s War on Women* (2011); *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood & American Culture* (2013); *The Occupation of the American Mind: Israel’s PR War in the United States* (2016); and *Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse* (2017). He was executive producer and co-writer of MEF’s first project with Tim Wise, *White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege in America* (2013). Prior to joining MEF, he taught at New School University and Parsons School of Design in New York City, at the Art Institute of Boston and Northeastern University in Massachusetts, and worked as a news and sports reporter for a daily newspaper outside of Boston.

SUT JHALLY (executive producer) is the founder and Executive Director of the Media Education Foundation (MEF). He is the producer, director, or executive producer of dozens of MEF films, including *Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Video* (1990); *Advertising & the End of the World* (1997); *Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity* (1999); *Killing Us Softly 3* (1999); *Wrestling with Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering* (2003); *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land: U.S. Media & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (2004); *Hijacking Catastrophe: 9/11, Fear & the Selling of American Empire* (2004); *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2006); *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* (2007); *The Codes of Gender: Identity & Performance in Popular Culture* (2009), *The Occupation of the American Mind: Israel’s PR War in the United States* (2016), and *Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse* (2017); He is also professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts, a leading scholar on advertising, public relations, and political propaganda, and the author of several books, including *The Codes of Advertising*, *Enlightened Racism*, and *The Spectacle of Accumulation*.

LORETTA ALPER (producer) has produced and/or co-directed several documentaries for the Media Education Foundation, including *No Logo: Brands, Globalization, Resistance* (2003); *Captive Audience: Advertising Invades the Classroom* (2003); *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class* (2005), *War Made Easy: How Presidents & Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* (2007); and *The Occupation of the American Mind: Israel's PR War in the United States* (2016). In addition, she heads up MEF's media research team. Prior to joining MEF in 2000, she was a high school English teacher in Amherst, Mass., worked for a number of independent print and radio outlets, curated an independent film series, and was a 35-mm film projectionist.

JASON YOUNG (co-producer) has edited and/or co-produced several documentaries for the Media Education Foundation, including *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood* (2008); *Not Just a Game: Power, Politics & American Sports* (2010); *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood & American Culture* (2013); *White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege in America* (2013); *Guyland: Where Boys Become Men* (2015); *The Occupation of the American Mind: Israel's PR War in the United States* (2016); and *Constructing the Terrorist Threat: Islamophobia, the Media & the War on Terror* (2017). He is a graduate of Westfield State University, and interned with MEF before joining the staff full-time in 2006.

CREDITS

A Media Education Foundation Production

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Special Thanks to
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For more information about Tim Wise, visit

Timwise.org