

NO FASCIST USA!: THE JOHN BROWN ANTI-KLAN COMMITTEE & LESSONS FOR TODAY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

"Smash fascism! Read this book!"

—Tom Morello, songwriter and guitarist with Rage Against the Machine

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FASCIST
USA!**

THE JOHN BROWN ANTI-KLAN
COMMITTEE AND LESSONS FOR
TODAY'S MOVEMENTS

HILARY MOORE
AND JAMES TRACY

FOREWORD BY ROBIN D.G. KELLEY



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1. Robin D.G. Kelley takes issue with the idea that “racist terrorism rises in response to economic downturns, because of white downward mobility, or in a vacuum created by a lack of progressive alternatives.” Do you agree with this? What other factors propel racist terrorism?
2. Kelley places the events in the book as part of a long history of racist and anti-racist conflicts in United States society. Are such historical connections useful when considering the current moment? Why or why not?

PREFACE: PAST AS PROLOGUE

1. What do you think it means to define white supremacy as a system? Do you think that there are any other ways to understand the phenomenon?
2. What does the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee’s statement of their politics say about their approach to social justice?

The John Brown Anti-Klan Committee is a national organization that fights the racist violence of the KKK and Nazis, and their underlying cause, the system of white supremacy. We take our name from John Brown, the 19th Century white abolitionist who gave his life fighting against slavery and white supremacy. In the spirit of John Brown, we fight racism, build solidarity with the Black Liberation Movement, and support all struggles for human rights and self-determination.

3. Why do you think a radical organization would find it useful to name itself after John Brown, who died over a century before the group’s founding?

CHAPTER ONE: ONE LONG REIGN OF TERROR

1. While incarcerated at Napanoch, Khali Siwatu-Hodari wrote a letter to activists on the outside alerting them to widespread Klan infiltration of prison staff. Do you believe that members of hate groups should be allowed to work in prisons? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the historical difficulties in maintaining alliances between Black and white activists? How do you think these difficulties should be addressed?
3. The John Brown Anti-Klan Committee (JBAKC) created movement newspapers to communicate their politics and work to a broader audience. Today, fewer activists use print media, and instead favor the Internet as a tool. Do you think there are advantages to print that may have been lost in the past few decades?
4. Most of the founding members of the JBAKC had been committed activists in previous student, anti-racist, and anti-war movements. How did they try to apply the values from these movements to the politics of the late 1970s?
5. One of the central features of the JBAKC's approach to politics is the attempt to support the "self-determination" of Black and Brown people. What is self-determination? Are there practical ways to practice and support it in the United States?

CHAPTER TWO: ROOTS, RADICALS AND REAGAN

1. In Scotland, Connecticut, the JBAKC was not a welcomed anti-Klan force. Why? How did different groups perceive the threat of the Klan and, based on that, how did this shape the actions anti-Klan groups were willing to take? How does this happen today?
2. Is it fair to say that President Ronald Reagan benefited from the growth of the white supremacist movement in the 1980s?
3. In Arlington, Virginia the white supremacist group "New Order" asserted that the First Amendment gave them the right to rally at a public high school. Should limits be placed on the First Amendment rights of racist organizations? Are there any alternatives to calling for the government to intervene in these matters?
4. In California, Judge Sidney Cherniss denounced the Klan as "slimy, low and scummy," just before he dropped the charges against them for cross burning. Given this kind of reaction, is it useful for anti-racist organizers to engage the legal system? If so, how? If not, why?
5. Do you think it is accurate to say that police departments share interests of controlling and subduing Black and Brown movements and leaders? Why or why not?

CHAPTER THREE: AFTER WINTER MUST COME SPRING

1. What kinds of roles and risk did the JBAKC take on in coordination with the Black Citizens Task Force and the Brown Berets? What practices build effective multi-racial alliances today?
2. During the lifespan of the JBAKC, many radical white organizations in the United States strove to work under the leadership of people of color-led movements. What are the values behind this approach? What are some of the difficulties that might arise when trying to implement it? How do you see this playing out today?
3. The JBACK were *militant*. One way they interpreted this was confronting far-right mobilizations whenever and wherever they showed themselves. What are the benefits of this uncompromising stance? Are there limits to this approach?
4. How did the Ku Klux Klan and related groups begin to remake their image with narratives of “white rights” and reverse racism?

CHAPTER FOUR: CONFRONTATIONS AND CULTURE WARS

1. What did Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. mean when he said that in Chicago “swastikas bloomed like misbegotten weeds?”
2. Given the prevalence of organized white supremacists in northern cities like Chicago, why do you think that racism is often portrayed in the media as worse in southern cities?
3. Does the decision to collectively and publicly cover up racist graffiti make strategic sense to you? Why or why not?
4. What made punk rock so powerful that racist and anti-racist organizations wanted to use it to reach potential recruits?

CHAPTER FIVE: SMALL STEPS IN A LONG ROAD

1. What kind of world do you think that the JBAKC wanted to come into being?
2. What values and politics of the JBAKC were reflected in HIV/AIDS and anti-prison work their members did after the end of the organization?

CHAPTER SIX: LESSONS FOR TODAY'S MOVEMENTS

1. What are some things that today's anti-racist organizers ought to emulate about the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee?
2. Are there aspects JBAKC's approach that you would not recommend today's anti-racist organizers emulate?
3. What does solidarity mean to you? What does it mean for a person or organization to be in solidarity with another?
4. Do you think that who is in elected office, and their rhetoric, impacts the intensity of racist violence in the United States. Why or why not?

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