RACE-CLASS ACADEMY

3.2
Interest convergence

Key building blocks

This video pivots to thinking about Race-Class as a way to build a multi-racial supermajority. The initial focus is on what this means for, and requires from, the Race Left.

Members of the Race Left prioritize helping communities of color. They may hesitate, therefore, to embrace a conception of racism that also includes harms to white people. This may seem to dilute the focus on helping communities of color.

In truth, encouraging white people to see themselves as harmed by racism is itself a key step toward racial justice. Interest convergence explains why.
- **Interest convergence is the idea that support for racial justice depends on people understanding how racial justice benefits themselves.** This means most white people will support racial justice when it helps their own families.
- To win support for racial justice from the broadest possible coalition, white people have to understand how racism hurts them and how fighting racism helps them.

This video is also important in introducing **a Race-Class approach to racial justice**.
- **The Race-Class approach responds to the dog whistle message by shifting the threat from supposedly dangerous people of color to the powerful elites pushing division.**
- Compare this to standard Democratic messaging, which all too often seeks to present Democrats as also standing ready to take a hard line on protesters, criminals, and immigrants. In effect, the standard Democratic approach reinforces the dog whistle threat narrative.

Antiracist protip

Interest convergence can be a tricky topic because it directs attention to self-interest as a motive for white people to join the fight against racism. This might be understood as an implicit critique of white people along the lines of "whites will only help themselves, not others." This is no more true of white people than of other racial groups. In every community, there are some who will sacrifice their own

interests in order to help others. Yet in every community, for most, real cooperation depends on people having a sense that this is good for themselves.

Here's another possible misunderstanding: that people who act out of self-interest are not moral people. The reality is far more complex. Once again, some few are capable of seeing how their actions or place in society may be immoral. For the majority, however, what is moral and immoral is often filtered through a lens of what allows one to feel good about one's self and one's position in society.

Interest convergence doesn't just apply to whites. It applies to all of us.

Sample questions	Potential answers
INTEREST CONVERGENCE	
1. The video describes Race-Class as a "praxis"—that is, as theory applied to and shaped by practice. How is this different from Race-Class as narrative, discussed in video 3.1?	The Race-Class story cannot remain just something we say. It must inform how we understand what has happened to us. (See level 1). And it must inform how we build Race-Class solidarity. In other words, taking the Race-Class approach to heart asks us to start doing the hard work of building cross-racial bridges.
2. What does Race-Class as praxis mean for the Race Left?	It means creating space for white people to see themselves as harmed by racism and to see themselves as full partners in the multiracial society we want to build. (We will think about what Race-Class as praxis means for the Class Left in the next video.)
3. What is interest convergence?	An idea pioneered by critical race theorist Derrick Bell who said that big advances in racial justice occur when the interests of Black people converge, or align, with the interests of white people. The video presents this as a formula: Black interests + white interests = racial justice

4. Why would the interests of white people be important to whether society moves toward racial justice?	Because, after centuries of racism, white people as a group continue to hold the most power in this society, whether that is measured in terms of electoral power, wealth, or cultural position.
5. Do all white people have to support racial justice?	No, but powerful segments of the white population have to see themselves helped by racial justice. This can be political elites, or great masses of whites, or some combination.

INTEREST CONVERGENCE IN ACTION: MASS DEPORTATION

1. In the video, Ian presents a Race-Class argument against mass deportation that was tested among audiences of different races. How did it do?	The Race-Class argument against mass deportation beat the dog whistle message by 11 points among Latinos, 19 points among Black people, and 6 points among white people.
2. The Race Left message also criticized mass deportation. Can you recall how the Race Left message did among these groups, especially among whites?	The Race Left message lost among whites. It's been awhile, but video 2.2 shows this, indicating it lost among whites by 7 percentage points. In other words, the Race-Class argument increased support among white people for immigration reform from down by 7 to up by 6 percentage points, taking it from a losing to a winning argument.

And as video 3.1 showed, Race-Class messages also perform better than Race Left messages among communities of color. In particular, the Race-Class immigration message won agreement from an additional 4 percent of Latinos and an additional 4 percent of African Americans, compared to the call-out racism message. |

THE RACE-CLASS ARGUMENT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE	
1. This video shows you what a Race-Class argument for racial justice looks like. Can you identify the three core components of a Race-Class story in the message against mass deportation?	The message is below.
2. How does the Race-Class approach to racial justice respond to the dog whistle message? What does it say about where the real threats in our lives come from?	The Race-Class approach shifts the threat. It's not supposedly dangerous people of color—they are our neighbors. Instead, the real source of threat comes from powerful elites stoking division. It also changes the problem from white racism in general to powerful elites pushing division. This idea that violence against communities of color is primarily caused by powerful elites, and not general societal racism, is an important theme of these videos. Recall video 1.3 on government violence against communities of color, and also video 2.2 talking about Ian's shift from a Race Left approach to a Race-Class approach.
3. According to the Race-Class message for immigration reform, who benefits? And why is this an important part of the message?	The message concludes that this is how we can "make this a country that provides a better life for everyone, whether we're brown, Black or white." This is interest convergence in action.
5. (optional) Now you've seen the Race Left message about racial justice. How does it	● **Who are we?** We're people who are willing to move if that's what it takes to build a better life for our families

answer the key identity questions?	● **Who threatens us?** Powerful elites pushing fear as their divide-and-conquer strategy ● **Who are our allies?** Everyone willing to join together to make sure government takes care of all of us

The Race-Class argument for immigration reform

This video featured a Race-Class argument against deportation. Below is the full text of the message.

> Whether it's from another town or another country, most of us move for the same reason—to build a better life for our families.
>
> But especially during COVID-19, certain politicians are insulting immigrants while billions are going to a handful of corporations. The richest 1 percent benefit when politicians blame immigrants for the hard times regular people face.
>
> We need to recognize the contributions of immigrants in our communities and states, and embrace people with the courage to move. When we come together, we can elect new leaders who will put fairness back into our immigration laws and make this a country that provides a better life for everyone, whether we're brown, Black or white.