

CREATED BY
MALYNDA HALE & DAN LUXENBERG

COMMON GROUND

Executive Producer: Van Jones



A documentary series on the shared strength of the Black and Jewish communities.



WHAT IS COMMON GROUND?

Common Ground is a four-part documentary series exploring the deep and often untold connections between the Black and Jewish communities.

This series shifts the narrative from shared struggles to shared resilience, culture, and faith

We highlight moments of unity, activism, and collaboration, showing how these communities have built something powerful together.



WHY NOW?

At a time of rising antisemitism and racial tension, we need stories that remind us of our shared history, values, and the power of coming together. This is a story of strength, not just survival.

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- 4 x 45-minute episodes
- Featuring historians, cultural commentators, activists, and artists
- Archival footage, first-person narratives, expert analysis



SELMA DIDN'T START IN SELMA

From slavery to Selma, the premiere traces the earliest Black-Jewish bonds - using the lynching of Leo Frank as a lens to reflect overlooked Black suffering and show how one tragedy sparked a shared pursuit of justice.

It begins not with partnership but with parallel voices: Frederick Douglass, once enslaved, calling for abolition, and Rabbi David Einhorn, a Jewish immigrant who risked his pulpit to do the same. Though they never met, their moral outcries echoed in harmony.

But as those voices fade, a darker one rises: Thomas E. Watson, a Southern demagogue who turns economic frustration into racial and religious hate - first toward Black Americans, then Jews. His rhetoric fuels violence, and soon lynching becomes not just a tactic but a message.

In 1913, a Jewish factory manager named Leo Frank was falsely accused of murder in Atlanta. The trial becomes a media circus, and the focus of this episode. Black witnesses are silenced. Frank is convicted, then lynched by a mob. His death shocks the Jewish community - but for Black Americans, it's a familiar horror. Frank's lynching made headlines; theirs rarely did. This disparity becomes a mirror. For many Jews, it's a painful awakening: if this could happen to "one of us," what had they failed to see in "them" all along?

That reckoning births an alliance. In the aftermath, Jewish leaders like Henry Moskowitz and Lillian Wald join W.E.B. Du Bois to found the NAACP - not as charity, but as clarity: justice could no longer be pursued in isolation. And when Jewish refugees flee Europe decades later, rejected by many American institutions, it is HBCUs that open their doors, offering displaced scholars a place to teach, to live, to heal.

The episode ends in Selma. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel march side by side. Their steps were not spontaneous. They were the next verses in a centuries-old song of resistance - first sung by Douglass and Einhorn, carried through Frank's tragedy, and still rising today.





FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM

Locked out of mainstream power, Black and Jewish pioneers turned rejection into rhythm - joining forces to reshape American music, business, and culture.

This story begins with closed doors. The music industry of the 1980s was designed to keep hip-hop out. It was too raw, too local, too Black. But from those margins rose two unlikely co-conspirators: Russell Simmons, a kid from Queens with a vision for the culture, and Lyor Cohen, an Jewish immigrant with a business mind and deep respect for the movement. Together, they built Def Jam.

Their turning point, and the drama we follow in this episode? A gamble: pairing Run-D.M.C. with Aerosmith on “Walk This Way.”

It shouldn’t have worked. MTV didn’t want to touch it.

But when it aired, something seismic happened. The underground came above ground. A genre built from exclusion cracked open the mainstream.

But this isn’t just a story of one song. Decades earlier, Jewish composers like George Gershwin tried to honor Black musical traditions through works like Porgy and Bess. Jewish songwriters filled the Brill Building, crafting hits with and for Black artists. At Motown, Berry Gordy worked hand-in-hand with Barney Ales to get Black music into white homes. These weren’t moments of charity. They were moments of mutual struggle... two communities that knew what it meant to be shut out, finding power in shared storytelling.

As Def Jam rises, hip-hop explodes - LL Cool J, Beastie Boys, Public Enemy, Slick Rick. Artists keep their creative control. Executives fight for their vision. The margins aren’t just surviving anymore: they’re building the new center of culture. Then Jay-Z enters the scene. He signs with Def Jam, drops The Blueprint, and transforms not just what a rapper sounds like... but what a mogul looks like. A new era begins: Roc Nation, 300 Entertainment, YouTube Music. What started as an alliance forged by exclusion becomes a redefinition of influence, ownership, and power.

This episode ends not in a studio, but in a boardroom. The partnership that reshaped music is no longer asking for a seat at the table: it’s building the table. Together, these pioneers didn’t just make hits. They changed what America sounds like, and who gets to sing.

BITTER HERBS & SWEET TEA

Born from struggle and shaped by survival, Black and Jewish cuisines transformed pain into nourishment, feeding generations and preserving identity through every bite.

In this episode, we follow three chefs—one Black, one Jewish, and one who stands at the intersection of both: culinary historian and James Beard Award winner Michael Twitty. As they prepare meals rooted in their heritage, they tell the stories that ingredients alone can't: stories of migration and memory, loss and resilience, bitter herbs and sweet tea. This is a story of what's been taken, and what's been reclaimed.

This story of both communities' cuisine begins with scarcity, with what was left over and what could be made out of almost nothing. For Black Americans, it was the cast-off cuts - collard greens, oxtails, pig's feet - turned into soul food staples through seasoning, creativity, and care. For Jewish communities in the diaspora, it was preservation and adaptation - brisket slow-cooked to tenderness, gefilte fish stretched to feed many, matzo born from urgency. Food wasn't just sustenance, it was resistance.

These meals were not designed for luxury. They were born in the shadows of slavery, pogroms, migration, and forced exile. They carried stories across oceans and through generations. Recipes were passed down like scripture, each dish a record of what was endured and what could not be taken away.

But this isn't just a story of struggle, it's a story of ingenuity. Just as soul food and Ashkenazi staples grew from hardship, they also blossomed with pride. Juneteenth red drinks, sweet potato pies, and gumbo became cultural declarations. So too did challah braided on Shabbat, latkes fried in oil, and dishes stewed overnight. Plate by plate, these dishes told stories, connected families, and built identity.

As time moved forward, so did the flavors. Jewish delis in Harlem. Black chefs reclaiming Southern traditions. Fusion, adaptation, preservation. Food as memory. Food as culture. Food as protest. And food as an invitation - to sit, to talk, and to understand.

Our episode culminates in a communal dinner - an inter-dining experience where the Black and Jewish communities come together, not just to eat, but to connect. To reflect on the values they share: faith, family, liberation, justice. Around one table, we break bread. We share stories. And we remember: in both cultures, food has always meant more than flavor. It has meant survival. It has meant joy. It has meant home.



REFORM

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JUSTICE, REWRITTEN

Today, Black and Jewish leaders reignite a shared moral calling - transforming lives, shaping laws, and redefining what justice looks like, together.

The episode opens with a headline that stops the country: Meek Mill sentenced to 2-4 years for a probation violation. To some, it's a celebrity story. But to millions, it's the latest chapter in a long, brutal book where Black men are criminalized not for breaking the law, but for existing within it.

But this time, the outrage doesn't fade. It sparks a movement. Jay-Z, Michael Rubin, and Robert Kraft come together to form Reform Alliance - a coalition built not on politics but on purpose. Their first act isn't flashy. It's focused. One person, one case, one life changed. We meet that person, not at a press conference, but in a moment of quiet humanity. That person becomes our lens.

Their story carries us through the episode. Through their reentry. Through the barriers that don't disappear after release. They show us what justice really takes, not just freedom from a cell, but the freedom to rebuild.

Alongside this story, we meet Van Jones, who helped them launch Reform, the organization built to walk with people after prison - not just fight to get them out. He eventually steps away and creates Exodus - a bridge-building initiative meant to bring Black and Jewish communities together. We meet Ashley Jackson, the daughter of Jesse Jackson, Black and Jewish, activist and bridge-builder. Her very identity is a symbol of what's possible when these communities don't just work together, but live together.

In the final act, Senator Cory Booker and Governor Josh Shapiro reflect on justice as a moral mandate. Not partisan. Not performative. But prophetic. They connect the past to the future - reminding us that the legacy of Black and Jewish solidarity doesn't live in history books. It lives in courtrooms, classrooms, and second chances.

The episode closes where it began: with a life. The person Reform helped now helps others. Justice, once extended to him, becomes something he extends to someone else. And in that moment, the work becomes real. Justice isn't a headline. It's a hand held out. A system changed. A soul restored.

POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES



WARRYN CAMPBELL

GRAMMY-WINNING PRODUCER | GOSPEL & R&B
INNOVATOR | FAITH LEADER



CORY BOOKER

U.S. SENATOR | CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATE | COMMUNITY
BUILDER



MEEK MILL

HIP-HOP ARTIST | CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM ACTIVIST |
ENTREPRENEUR



MICHAEL TWITTY

FOOD HISTORIAN | AUTHOR OF THE COOKING GENE | BLACK
& JEWISH CULTURAL SCHOLAR



DAVID WOLPE

RENOWNED RABBI | BESTSELLING AUTHOR | THOUGHT
LEADER ON FAITH & ETHICS



ZOË KRAVITZ

AMERICAN ACTRESS AND FILMMAKER



SUSANNAH HESCHEL

JEWISH SCHOLAR | CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORIAN | DAUGHTER
OF RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL



AVA DUVERNAY

FILMMAKER | STORYTELLER OF JUSTICE | CREATOR OF
SELMA & WHEN THEY SEE US*



MARC PLATT

AWARD-WINNING BROADWAY & FILM PRODUCER | LA LA
LAND, WICKED, DEAR EVAN HANSEN*



DESIREE PEREZ

CEO OF ROC NATION | MUSIC & BUSINESS POWERHOUSE |
CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADVOCATE



ARI LAMM

JEWISH PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL | HISTORIAN OF RELIGION



DAVEED DIGGS

AMERICAN ACTOR AND RAPPER



MALYNDA HALE

CO-CREATOR, PRODUCER

SINGER, ACTRESS, AND ACTIVIST DEDICATED TO RACIAL JUSTICE AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE.



DAN LUXENBERG

CO-CREATOR, PRODUCER

MEDIA ENTREPRENEUR AND DOCUMENTARIAN FOCUSED ON IMPACTFUL STORYTELLING.



VAN JONES

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

EMMY AWARD-WINNING JOURNALIST AND ADVOCATE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE AND UNITY.



WHITE LABEL PRODUCTIONS

EMMY AWARD-WINNING UNSCRIPTED PRODUCTION COMPANY.

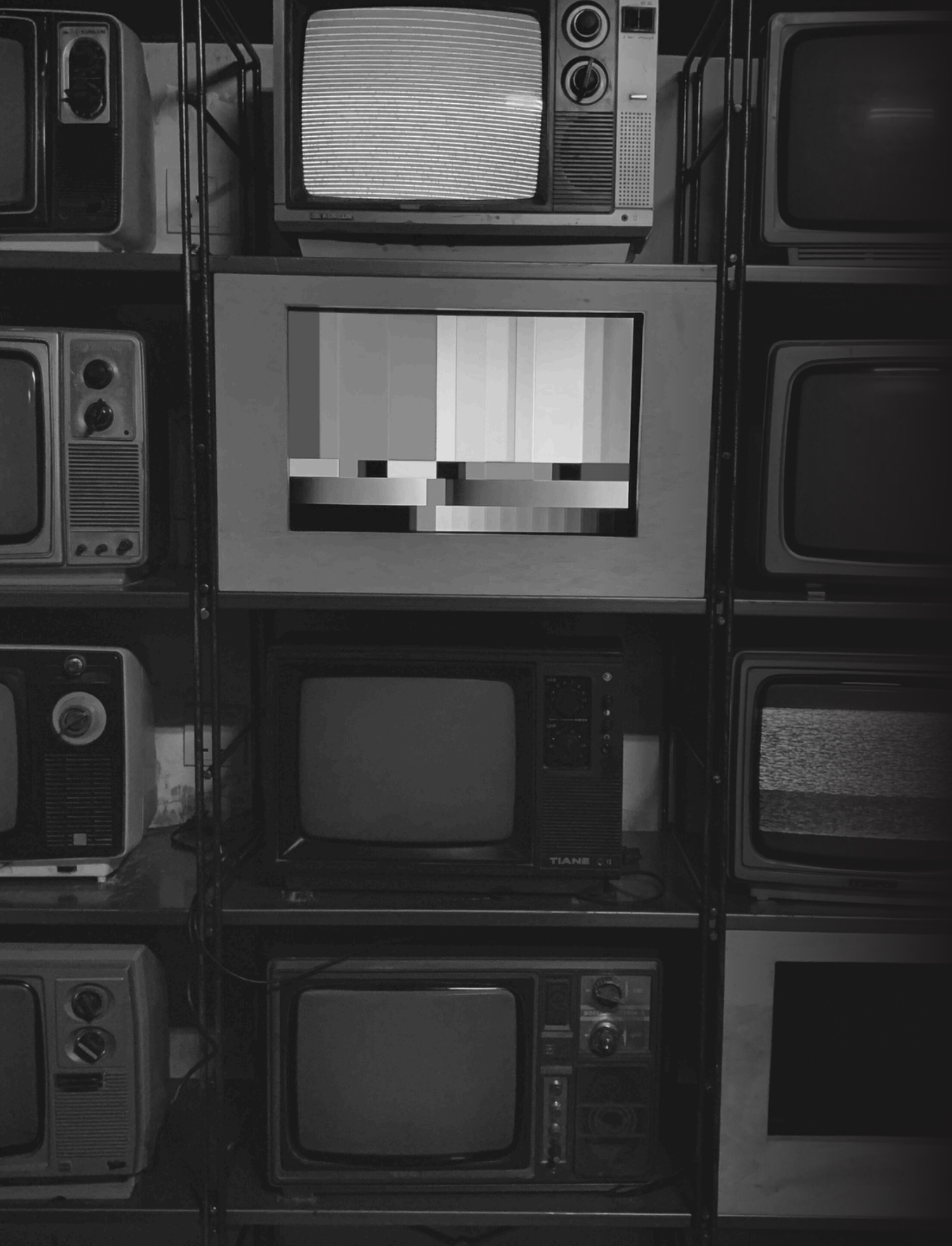
OUR TEAM



WHY FUND THIS?

- **A New Narrative:** Most films focus on Black and Jewish struggles—Common Ground highlights resilience, collaboration, and culture.
- **Bridging Communities:** A rare opportunity to strengthen Jewish and Black relations.
- **Global Impact:** A story for streaming platforms, classrooms, and community screenings.
- **Timely & Necessary:** Combating rising antisemitism and racism with shared history and hope.





DISTRIBUTION & IMPACT

- **Platform Strategy:** Seek license agreements with distributors (Netflix, Amazon, PBS, and Jewish and Black cultural networks)
- **Community Engagement:** Screenings at Jewish federations, HBCUs, and interfaith events.
- **Social Media:** Digital content strategy to amplify the series.
- **Educational Use:** Partnering with Jewish and Black organizations to incorporate the series into schools and cultural programs.



JOIN US IN BRINGING COMMON GROUND TO LIFE!

PARTNER WITH US TO **FUND AND DISTRIBUTE THIS GROUNDBREAKING SERIES.**

LET'S RESHAPE THE CONVERSATION AND BUILD A FUTURE ROOTED IN **SHARED STRENGTH, CULTURE, AND UNITY.**

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