

DEAR FELLOW WHITE PEOPLE:

by John Costello, *white person*

I'd like to begin with a brief disclaimer: the terms "racist" and "racism" are considered bad words to all reasonable members of our society. And rightly so, racism and racist thoughts, actions, and ideas must be eliminated if our goal is destroying the white supremacist power structure. However, we have arrived at a point where we as white folk consider being called racist as somehow worse than actually being racist. Implicit bias, a more innocuous term for ingrained racist ideation, is a natural byproduct of generations of white supremacy. White supremacy IS racism. White privilege IS racism. White silence IS racism. We white people were born into a vast system that centers and privileges whiteness at all times and has for hundreds of years. It's time that we stop hiding behind more palatable words and just call it what it is. Fellow white people, I am racist, and so are you. It is not your fault, but it is your responsibility.

This section is designed to utilize the experiences and lessons of white people in the movement to help other white people be as useful and effective as possible.

Framing your whiteness in this movement moment

(adapted by John Costello from *Boston White Racial Justice People Activate* (<http://bit.ly/1NtiSig>))

White inaction is violence

Inaction and silence = endorsement (which causes more harm)

White Silence = State Violence

White Self-Criticism is Essential

Always check your motives

Own your mistakes and hold yourself accountable

Talk about anti-racism with other white people in the movement. Do this often.

Do NOT Expect People of Color to Teach You How to Not be Racist

It is a form of violence to request that oppressed people explain their oppression to their oppressor (and make no mistake, we white people are the oppressor)

Follow Black Leadership

Do not become defensive when you are called out. Instead try to understand why your words and actions may be problematic

We Center Black Lives at All Times

Not just when we are in the streets, but also at work, in our families, etc.

“Solidarity” is being willing to run the same risks

White people as accomplices, not leaders of this movement

Read: *Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex*⁴

This means not only taking on leadership amongst white people, though that is important (e.g. taking on the work of educating and building communities), but also responding to and taking direction from BLM leaders (not giving direction or creating demands)

Examples of accomplice actions:

- Interrupting oppression
- Risk Taking
- Solidarity – not leaving Black and Brown people alone in the struggle
- Strategic use of white privilege to gain larger access to resources or alleviate Black individual or group negative consequences
- Stepping back
- Accountability

Solidarity: We know that the structures of domination cannot be undermined without risk. Through solidarity, we share the price of our resistance and attempt to mediate the violence of the systems of oppression. While we may incur suffering as a result of our actions, we don't embrace suffering for its own sake. Our goal is to alleviate suffering, and our solidarity extends to all who suffer under political and economic repression.

Lisa Fithian

Roles & Responsibilities for White People in Movement Space

These are not up for debate – this is what we've been called to do. They might sound obvious to some, but they are necessary to hear, repeat, and amplify.

- We are called to commit to the struggle for liberation
- This is not a test – this is a struggle for liberation. (This is the real thing.)
- There's no greater reward for our actions than freedom
- These commitments are not about having a “perfect track record” or being “a good white”

⁴ <http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>

Show up: the presence of white people in the street often determines the level of police aggression. Do NOT escalate police aggression.

Stay off the megaphone: this is simple, you are not a march leader, you are not a chant leader.

Direct media to Black leadership: it will be flattering and tempting when media approaches you, and they will. The media loves white faces. You are not a spokesperson for this movement. Show media the Black Leadership who are.

Follow direction of Black leadership: And recognize that Black leadership won't always be accessible

Protest from our position:

We are not Mike Brown. We CAN breathe. – Instead of co-opting Black people's experiences, we can carry signs challenging white supremacy

"Whose streets? Our streets!" – We do NOT need to keep chanting this and claiming the streets for white people

Use our position within white supremacy to challenge it

Call-in/collect white folks who are causing harm and/or breaking guidelines set by Black leadership.

Meet the level of escalation with police, DO NOT exceed it

- Recognize that police reaction to white escalation affects Black people exponentially more than white people
- If you take a risk as a lone wolf, you are potentially endangering Black lives
- Do not abandon Black people during the action to face police alone

We have a strategic commitment to militant nonviolent resistance – honor that

- This is the directive we've received in this movement moment (attend a training to learn more!).
- Militant = confrontation (not a pep rally), we're creating "moral drama"
- Nonviolent = not engaging in violence against people or the state
- Property destruction refocuses attention on white actions
- "We are decentralized and disciplined." – Rev. Sekou

Recognize group responsibility before, during, and after action. Ensure everyone is bailed out of "jail," and strive to do court support

This extends beyond those who are in court for action-specific arrests, recognizing that many of the people going through the court system are affected by the system that we're protesting

When planning white-specific solidarity actions, target spaces of white power, and don't speak for Black people but about white culpability

- We're talking about systemic transformation, not asking communities of color to change their behavior for white benefit.
- If you have to go somewhere where you don't generally go (and you haven't been invited by Black leadership), that's probably not the right place to coordinate an action

- Think about how to utilize our position as white folks to interrupt white-dominated spaces and white normalcy

We have been called to action, not just speaking. We need to be responding appropriately, taking risks, following through. We can be successful.

If we're going to ask white people to leave their comfortable lives and start challenging racism (potentially an alienating move), we have a responsibility to create a space for them to come into – to move in the direction of community.

As we use this moment to make connections, we should recognize that we're not yet where we want to be. Some work is structural/risk-taking. Some work is creating counter-culture.

Make centering Black lives an authentic part of your daily practice. Choose to use your whiteness to dismantle white supremacy.

Seek supportive guidance from Black leadership with organized and thoughtful proposals as opposed to badgering Black leadership for handholding support (think it through before approaching POC for feedback). Remember: we have been called to *action*.