

Thoughts on White Ally In/Action  
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At the end of several weeks, which followed several centuries of lynchings (Strange Fruit by Billie Holiday) assassinations and state sanctioned murders I'm exhausted, but ready for the next stage of action to dismantle these apparatuses of racism, white supremacy and oppression. (Killing in the Name by Rage Against the Machine)

As I wander onto Social Media I am seeing countless links to articles, memes, etc. about what White People can do to be allies in the struggle and to do their part in ending racist actions. I appreciate that you are looking and I care about many of you and wouldn't take the significant time it took for me to write this if I didn't. What I hope though are that these aren't self-congratulatory opportunities for folks to explore lists of actions that they will stop doing in a week that are often comprised of items that will have little actual impact. I want to be clear I appreciate the fervor during this chaos of many white folks in trying to find ways to help but I will also point out that many of the most significant ways to help are right in front of you and that sometimes these lists (often filled with inactions) can create illusions of activity through self satisfaction which cover realities of inactivity and lack of forward movement.

From the perspective of a Black man, I have spent a little time going through several of these articles to see what I think about the recommendations. While anything anyone tries to put together these days (including this) is at best perfectly imperfect, and there are plenty of people smarter than me, better writers than me, and probably better people than me as I am incredibly flawed and have made as many mistakes in my life as any, that's ok, I'm still going to share my thoughts here, you don't have to engage with these at all, and you definitely don't need to prove anything to me, do with these thoughts as you wish.

Many of these lists have dozens and dozens of actions, I encourage you to do all that is contained in them as many are really good but what I saw missing from most of these were actions that connected to personal sacrifice and those are the actions that have the greatest impact. I think that people often convince themselves that they are powerless so they have the excuse to not do anything of substance. People who know me know I'm a fan of the Frederick Douglass quote "If there is no struggle, there is no progress" I've never interpreted that as someone else having to do all the struggling but rather as what am I or you going to sacrifice for the struggle? There is hope through action.

Since I can't cover everything I read while going into specifics, in reviewing these articles I saw some common themes and picked out a few to add to, while making a few simple points that I argue are the next level above, "things that don't actually require sacrifice". The first point is that I get it, you are receiving information from

several sources, some align, some contradict, its confusing, guess what, this stuff is hard. If you can't deal with sorting through all of this advice you probably aren't ready to be a part of making real change. If this is too long to read, you may not be ready to take on the responsibility of engaging in a movement and of claiming ally status. As I said I'm focusing on the immediate next level, I'm not even touching the more advanced stuff.

To add other voices and because at times I think I probably communicate better through music than through words, I'm also adding a playlist of songs I would encourage you to look up and listen to that I think will help better express some of the points I will be making. Again just like my words I'm sure there will be critiques that some of these songs are 60, 50, 40, 30, 20, 10, years old and folks are writing more of these songs as you read this, but that's sort of the point, folks have been singing about this for hundreds of years and the songs are still relevant because the systemic racism in this country hasn't been destroyed.

Finally I want to be clear, I don't speak for Black folks, I don't speak for People of Color, and I definitely don't speak for white people, I'm just sharing my thoughts, take what you need and leave the rest.

#### Reading Materials -

I've seen several of these articles recommend some really powerful books and articles but most of these are recently written pieces, I will also encourage you to read and learn from our current thought leaders but ask you to stop fetishizing them and making them "magical negroes" that fill your needs. This is not about creating fan clubs its about Freedom. I also encourage you to expand your way of consuming information beyond the ways you are most comfortable with as other mediums allow for more voices that represent different perspectives.

I'm also going to recommend that you read older foundational works as well. These are who many of these current authors read (they would say the same), your current go to authors and thought leaders are standing on the shoulders of giants, and if you really want to understand their work you need to understand where it came from. Just like we are currently devaluing our older generations and allowing them to unnecessarily die during this Covid-19 crisis, folks from the outside often ignore and devalue the elders of these movements and the lines of thought they developed. These movements didn't just start in the past few years when you became aware of them, ignoring the past perpetuates the idea that this just started when you "woke" up. Honor the movement by not disregarding the hard thought that went into shaping the current thoughts. This will take a lot of reading, some of these will have lines of thought that have obviously changed, learning is hard. This is by no means a comprehensive list, it's just a list of a few authors to consider that I'm not seeing on most of these lists, do the work to find more:

Marcus Garvey, WEB DuBois, Ida B. Wells, James Baldwin, CLR James, Malcolm X, Paul Gilroy, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Richard Wright, Claude Brown, etc.  
(Old Marcus Garvey by Burning Spear)

### Education and Community in General –

I have seen several of these articles for instance recommend buying children books about POC so that your kids are better informed. Great, do that, but why don't you send your kid to the public school that has POC they could actually know as human beings and wouldn't have to read about in a book? Without utilizing racist displacement strategies what about using choice and choosing a neighborhood that is actually diverse racially and economically. What about putting your kid in spaces like a preschool where they are the minority so they don't get used to holding power. I constantly see people complain about the lack of diversity in the neighborhood that they CHOSE to live in! The result might be a school that doesn't have the incredible AP Latin class or whatever, that might be the cost for this other thing that you value and if you want it so bad and think its important for kids to have you are more likely to fight for it for your school than someone else's. Living in these bubbles allows you to fashionably complain but not have to deal with the day to day issues that come from systemic racism and oppression, you can look away when it is inconvenient instead of fixing what you and others are impacted by. When you live in that self-created bubble you can't see the other America and the result is that you have no immediacy to end the struggle because in essence your America is doing fine. Some of your privilege is choice, use it.  
(Which way to America by Living Colour)

### Work –

I have seen several recommendations about the workplace and I can't go through them all, but I can give you a few additional things to think about. You know when you get that incredible opportunity for a promotion, or you get the opportunity to serve on that committee or make that presentation, or a you get word about a new job at a new place that hasn't been advertised yet, or you have a connection who thought of you and then offers you a great new position? Guess what, not advertising that position or having a sincere process that allows for POC to have a real shot is one of many things that leads to continued disparities. I get it, it's incredibly hard to see the position that you were just offered not through the lens of you simply being wonderful or to recognize the greater impact on POC and in turn their communities, and it is definitely an incredibly hard thing to do to actually turn down something like that, but you said you wanted to be an ally and sometimes it means sacrifice. Say "no", and why you said no, and help them build an equitable system.

When you see that the Board is racist, that the 401k is invested in prisons, that you have a colleague that calls people niggers when other folks aren't around, that the Diversity training they do is not backed up with any actions and that they are monetizing an inauthentic set of core values that centers DEI work (which is currently a commodity) bring those issues to the light of day, demand and receive immediate systemic change and if that doesn't happen, tear the place apart or quit. Is this easy? No, but if you plan for the option it is possible and you will be more

likely to actually act than to just bemoan the situation and claim ally status for complaining.

Mental health –

For those of you with kids, many of you know how annoyed you can get when someone without kids spends five minutes with kids then either talks about how hard it is raising kids or they praise themselves for how great they are at raising kids for five minutes.

Black folks deal with being black, every day, all day, all black folks do, it is a full time job! Some of us even take a second full time job working on social justice issues professionally or as volunteers. You can imagine how tired we are after a long day. Breathe before you ask me to do more for you. Just like you aren't looking for parenting advice from me, the guy with no kids, I'm not looking for any advice on how I should think about or deal with the world as a black man from white people unless I ask, and guess what if I ask someone for advice I'm probably gonna ask a black person. This is traumatic stuff. I know this is a big ask but don't burden us with also comforting you and validating your wokeness right now so that you can feel more at ease. I appreciate your efforts, but I've got other things on my mind and I have to get up again tomorrow and work my two jobs.

Have you ever seen me cry? It is not a pretty sight. During times like this I do it uncontrollably and at random times when I can't even identify what triggered it. I may want to be comforted I may want to be alone, I may be angry I may be sad. This is a bit of what the trauma of 400 years of American racism looks like. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five said it best, "Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge, I'm trying not to lose my head, Its like a jungle sometimes it make me wonder how I keep from going under". Here is the hard thing, give me what I need and ask for, not what you want to give me to make you feel better.

(Be Free by J Cole)(The Message by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five)

This isn't all about you -

I'm glad folks are sharing tools to help you make a more significant contribution to the struggle but the point is to end racism and white supremacy not to feel better about yourself, our suffering isn't here so that you can absolve yourself and feel better. At times it can feel similar to having a party and someone comes who doesn't know anyone and expects you to take care of them the whole night. I'm not having a party just so I can take care of you. Get yourself together before coming, understand what we are gonna be eating, whose gonna be there, what music we are gonna be listening to, what we are gonna be arguing about and if you aren't ready for that don't come. Do your homework. I'm going to do my best but I'm not going to spend the whole night holding your hand. This takes work, it takes energy. Again come on out, you are going to feel out of place, uncomfortable and maybe even scared, and you will have to give up the power status that you hold in most of your interactions with POC of being the all knowing. Giving that up is hard but that's the cost of admission, and its much more informative then reading a book about it.

### Anger and Conflict –

People are finally waking up to this a bit, but stop saying Anger is an unacceptable emotion and acknowledge you've been trying to convince us of this for the past 400 years and it has gotten us nowhere. This is violent systemic oppression and force needs to be met with force. One of the reasons we are still in this situation is because the left has continued to say to Black people that anger is not acceptable and we as your white allies can't support you if you show your anger and frustration at this racist system. You are doing the work of the oppressors for them and are one of them, you fell for the okie doke and removed the threat and that is what is sometimes going to move the needle, accept and support that.

For 30 years I have been saying we can't take violent protest off the table. You have fallen for the line of thinking that holding people and systems accountable is bad and divisive. I recognize that for many of you conflict is upsetting but getting killed in the street is upsetting to me, so deal with it. For 30 years I have been attacked by the left for saying every option needs to be left on the table and be believable, we are decades behind where we could be if white "allies" hadn't encouraged us to take that off the table and if POC hadn't been complicit. Admit you were wrong and stop trying to determine the direction of the movement. Finally, this isn't an action but a reminder, don't confuse me with who you want black people to be and don't mistake my kindness, patience and tolerance for weakness.

(Stepping Razor by Peter Tosh; Fight the Power by Public Enemy; At the movies by the Bad Brains)

### Social Media –

I'm going to add to and simplify many of the things that I've been seeing in these articles in regards to social media. When you see something on your friend, relatives, colleagues, etc social media page, say something, don't place it on POC to fight it out and defend themselves. Do you have any idea what social media or simply trying to read a newspaper article online that has a comments section looks like to a black man like me? A little bit of information, then Nigger Nigger Nigger, a little info, veiled threats against black people, a little info then I'm not a racist but black people are destroying my wonderful neighborhood, etc. These are your people, handle your people, yes it may cost you some relationships, so be it. Im also going to let you in on the secret that many of your very public efforts to align actually look like attempts at absolution, and distancing from your people that we know often live in your own house . I'm also letting you know that when you go from a post about your outrage at black people dying to a post 5 minutes later about how delicious your grande soy mochachino is, it isn't a good look about how deeply impacted you actually were. When I see your meme about black voter registration, I see someone whose house isn't in order (white people got us this current administration) looking for blacks to blame or bail us out again, do the hard work and get your house in order.

Don't treat every time you read a book by a black author, every time you eat at that black owned business, every time you take your kid to that march, as a social media

photo op to show the world how progressive you are. Instead be present, be in learning mode, be listening to instructions and be aware, because you cant actually have my back while police are singling me out while you are trying to get the perfect light for your selfie. Again, is your action serving you or the movement?

I'm also seeing all these lists and its making me crazy because I'm wondering where all these folks were every day when I turn on FB and I see their buddies posting racist crap. What I'm saying is really think about what you are doing before you do it and ask yourself is this for you or for the movement?

I'm going to slide this in here because I see it so much. Don't only care about these events because they fit into one of your needs or agendas, whether its one of your conspiracy theories, your agenda about the environment, class, what diet you think people should have, whatever, take a breath, step back and let folks feel their stuff without being opportunistic and trying to co-opt peoples misery and pain. Sacrifice YOUR thing for just a bit, and guess what POC are the ones who are gonna step up and support your thing most consistently when they get a moment to breathe.

Friends and Family -

I've seen a number of articles explaining how to navigate relationships with racist friends and family, I'm going to make it simpler, Stop hanging out with Racists. Unless they are coming to you saying, hey I think I'm a racist and I am really looking to change my ways, cut them off, take the energy you waste on them and use it on building a movement. Stop negotiating with racists, stop spending all that energy debating peoples right to kneel for the anthem or rightfully assemble, stop falling for false equivalencies, there is no logic to follow as they are simply racist in their reasoning. If you aren't willing to lose a few people along the way, you aren't willing to make the necessary sacrifices. For family, make all holidays uncomfortable. When your racist, white supremacist uncle starts spewing his hatred or starts explaining what the blacks should do and how they should feel, grab your side dish or whatever you brought and go eat it in the car with your head held high instead of ending the evening in bed full of self-loathing, thinking about what you should have said. And here is a very real (based on the most recent voting patterns) and scary one, speak to your racist husband/partner that votes against the interests of POC and if you can't get him to come around, get out. There is definitely a problem if you place more stock in a happy marriage being centered on similar tastes in food and movies than a household that is comprised of people that actively value Black Lives. If this is the case you are probably not as far away from his beliefs as you would like to believe or are projecting to the world.

(Racist Friend by Special AKA)(Mississippi Goddamn by Nina Simone)

You aren't my ally if you bring other isms -

This one is a bonus as most of these articles are dealing primarily with race but I'm throwing it in anyways. You are absolutely not my ally if you are a misogynist, if you hate Muslims, Jews or whatever religion, if you have hate in your heart against the LGBTQIA communities, if you are a Xenophobe, if you have hate towards any POC...Work out those other issues and your other hatred before you even think of

approaching me because I will defend all of the above just as passionately as I will defend myself.

Be prepared/Take action –

Micro-aggressions are real and add up to the dehumanizing (making it easier to kill) and inevitable deaths of black people that you are finally witnessing. (Not yet Free by the Coup) Don't only react to the final event, these deaths are actually murders by whole communities of individuals who have all been carrying little knives and stabbing along the way through their inaction. How are you more likely to take action? by being prepared and practicing for the inevitable moment. Know what actions you will take, these transgressions don't move in slow motion or wait for your indecision. Don't spend all your time telling people what you would have done if you had been somewhere or what you will do, use that time to get whatever you need to protect yourself and prepare yourself to act. A few weeks ago I posted that at this point wearing an iron shirt (a bulletproof vest) may be necessary as black people continue to be hunted, I will not shelter from the hate, I will go about my business in the world but I will be prepared.

If you come across something that is questionable by all means be a witness and use your privilege but don't use your whiteness in a way that gets the Black persons ass kicked while you get to go home and tell your friends what an ally you are, because that is how it often works out. I've been pulled over a million times I know how to handle it, if you don't follow my lead and my directions, you are going to get ME shot. Most importantly in closing, act, Not acting is being complicit.

(Chase the Devil by Max Romeo)(We shall not be moved by Mavis Staples)

Our relationship –

All of these lists are great but understand that if I know you, I can probably very specifically name a time that you abandoned/screwed over or were not an ally to me or another POC. I could name a half dozen times I have been sold out by a white "ally" in the past week. You may also be surprised and disappointed to hear that the people I do consider allies rarely declare themselves as such, don't define themselves as woke, they just consistently do their part with no fanfare and I sincerely appreciate them for that. When you are really ready for some next level stuff be ready for that conversation. That might be hard to hear but that is a reality. I already see you.

A closing checklist –

As I said at the beginning there is an incredible amount to cover and even this really long document is too short to even scratch the surface but I tried. My goal was to synthesize some of what has been going around in these lists and suggest some next level ways to operationalize recommendations that actually include sacrifice, which is what will lead to actual change. While I hope what I already wrote is useful I'm going to try and give you a few simple things to assess potential actions by that makes it even simpler:

I don't care what level you want to operate at but don't use all your time convincing me you are doing stuff you aren't doing it is actually incredibly dangerous for me to think you have my back when you dont, its not a contest to collect the most points. Do what you are gonna do and do it well (we need folks doing stuff from the lists) and then get out of the way and await instructions for next steps.

Picture an old fashioned scale, then place you, your needs and desires on one side and place ending white supremacy and racism on the other and before every action take a look deep inside and see if the action benefits you or the movement and POC more, which side of the scale are things tipping towards?

I also want you to close your eyes and think about that nagging race related thing that you can't get rid of. That time X happened and you didn't do Y, you have replayed it for 10, 20, 30 years. We all have that thing. Deconstruct it, accept your shortcomings and inaction in that situation, do the work to put the things in place to do the right thing, and do it differently in the future.

You can do more than you generally like to believe you can do, you just have to do it.

And finally, if what you are doing doesn't hurt a little, what you are doing probably isn't enough.

Frederick Douglass

**"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."**

Thank you,  
Bill McKinney