

Racism Divides the 99%

Tips for White People to Challenge Racism At Occupy Detroit

-Based on work by Occupy Seattle & Joel Olsen's *Whiteness & the 99%*

As a means to repress the increasing militancy and solidarity of Native, African & European workers, European men of wealth created the idea of the white race. Whiteness extended privileges to peoples of European decent at the expense of non-Europeans (ie: people of color). When we talk about racism, it is about this legacy: a system that serves to benefit white people and oppress people of color. Talking about racism does not divide this movement... racism divides this movement.

"Why are people of color trying to divide us, we are all one as the 99%"

The ongoing legacies of slavery, genocide, imperialism and forced migration are dividing the 99%, not people of color who fight against these conditions. The idea of "us" assumes a common experience that does not exist. As more white people begin to feel the pain of economic injustice, we need to remember that economic crisis has been a constant in communities of color. White folks have an opportunity to acknowledge, honor and center the leadership of working-class people of color.

"Police brutality is a separate issue"

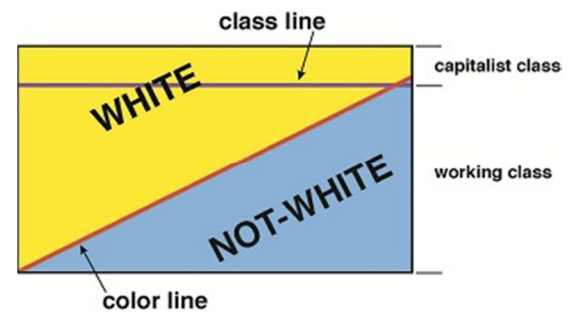
The institution of the police in the United States was created to capture "runaway slaves" of African descent, ie: to control communities based on their class and race. This continues today. The priorities of white people do not speak for everyone. Only by centering the experiences, issues and leadership of communities at margins (ie: communities of color) can we create transformative change.

"Occupy is our name and we would be divided if it changed"

The word "occupy" is rooted in the legacy of the genocide and colonization of indigenous peoples and communities of color generally. As a disproportionately white movement, the "Occupy" name was decided without authentic conversation with communities of color (hence the critique). We need to transform our language and framework in a way that honors the experience of communities of color. This will not only move us to decolonizing institutions, but also our minds and bodies.

Sitting with Discomfort & Guilt

White people in the United States disproportionately have more access to housing, medical care, social services, employment and broader economic resources. Meanwhile, people of color disproportionately face foreclosures, lack of access to health insurance, unemployment and denied basic social services. We also know that the top 1% is disproportionately white. This realization can cause many white people discomfort, guilt, or denial of our roles in racism. This guilt and discomfort can be a major barrier, and the solution isn't to ignore the problem – the solution is to practice accountability and speak up!



"Racism is a problem, but I don't see why People of Color need to be so angry"

White people have consistently been fearful of people of color organizing for their own liberation: from slave revolts to rallies for migrant justice. By sharing their experience and legitimate rage, people of color are giving white folks a powerful gift. Let us remember the power of oppression and recognize that anger is a justified response. We encourage white folks to resist getting defensive or shutting down, and instead be thankful, deeply reflect and take more informed action in the future.

"Why do people hate me for who I am?"

White folks need to understand how deeply racism shapes everyone's reality, as it has played out throughout all aspects of United States history (including contemporary social movements). No one hates you as an individual for being white, so please don't hate yourself. However... as a white person, you have a responsibility to be very critical of the impact of your privilege, take ownership of your actions and commit to learning from mistakes.

"I don't know what to say, so I think it's best to be silent"

Although white folks talk far more often than we listen, the solution is not to be silent. Far too often the burden of educating white folks about racism falls on people of color. Our nervousness does not bring about liberation and remember that our silence keeps us complicit. White folks need to speak up in favor of racial justice and be open to taking risks, learning along the way and finding ways to speak without overshadowing people of color.

Guidelines For Being a White Ally

Adapted from Paul Kivel's Guidelines for Being Strong White Allies

- **Assume racism is everywhere, every day.** White people have had the privilege of not noticing race and racism around us. Practice noticing it, who speaks, who has power, and how racism is minimized, denied, and justified.
- **Understand the connections between racism, economic issues, sexism, and other forms of oppression.**
- **Take risks, speak up.** Intervene in situations where racism is being passed on. It is scary and can be uncomfortable to do so, but your speaking up will change people's minds. It is your job, as a white person, to point out where racism is playing out.
- **Be strategic.** Decide what is important to challenge and what's not. Attack the source of power.
- **Don't call names or be personally abusive.** Attacking people doesn't address the systemic nature of racism and inequality.
- **Actively Support the Leadership, Agency and Autonomy of People of Color.**
- **Show up, listen, and be real.**
- **Learn something about the history of white people who have worked for racial justice.** There is a long history of white people who have fought for racial justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain you.
- **Be willing to be confronted about your own behavior and attitude and consider change.**
- **Don't do it alone.** You will not end racism by yourself. We can do it if we work together. Build support, establish networks, and work with already established groups.
- **Talk with your friends and family about racism.**

Honor the People of Color Caucus

An important practice of social movement organizing is caucusing. In order to create a safe and autonomous space to discuss the issues that impact their lives on their own terms, people of color have called a caucus. Anti-racist white folks can honor this by discouraging fellow white people to enter that space, educate fellow white people on the importance of anti-racism and organizing white people to attend the workshops above. **Yes, people of color are targeted by racism, but that doesn't mean POC are helpless victims and can't speak on their own behalf. We were told by a friend in the POC caucus, "we need allies in it WITH us, not leading us."**