

ALLYSHIP

A GUIDE TO ANTI-RACIST SOLIDARITY AT GOULD & BEYOND



Overview

Purpose: This guide is intended to present some basic tools for supporting and working in solidarity with peers and colleagues who belong to historically marginalized groups. It is divided into five parts: (1) Definitions, (2) Practices Essential to Allyship, (3) Potential Pitfalls, (4) Addressing Misconceptions about Race, and (4) Resource Guides for Further Reading/Listening/Viewing.

Why be an ally? Our country's centuries-long history of discrimination and violence against marginalized groups -- enshrined in and permitted by law until the mid twentieth century, and in some cases to this day -- has left a legacy of deep race-based disparities in all areas of public and private life, from education to criminal justice to income to health. If we do not actively work to close these gaps and challenge the assumptions, behaviors and policies that grow out of and perpetuate them, we are complicit in systemic racism. Rather than sit by while those most burdened by these disparities shoulder the project of dismantling them, we must use our comparative privilege to help power the fight for justice. That is the work of allyship (or accompliceship, as some prefer to call the most impactful form of the endeavor).

Sources: The content of this guide was distilled and synthesized from a wide range of sources, including but not limited to those listed on the final page. Where an idea or quote was taken from a single source, that source is credited individually.

A Few Definitions

Ally (n): Sometimes called an “accomplice,” a true ally is someone who is committed to actively, meaningfully and consistently taking on the sociopolitical struggles, large and small, of a marginalized group to which they do not belong. Importantly, allies do not necessarily understand the experience of those for whom they seek justice and equity -- they are simply willing to take real risks and do continuous, difficult work in solidarity with them. Finally, “ally” is not a self-assigned label; an ally must be viewed as such by those they seek to fight alongside.

Structural/Systemic Racism (n): Race-based disparities in societal opportunities and/or outcomes -- including in categories such as education, health, employment, income, wealth, housing and criminal justice -- rooted in a history of legally mandated or permitted racial discrimination and exploitation.

Institutional Racism (n): Race-based disparities within an institution that echo, reinforce, perpetuate, stem from or fail to take into account structural racism.

Individual Racism (n): A racially prejudicial or discriminatory action or belief that echoes, reinforces, perpetuates, stems from or fails to take into account structural racism. This includes “positive” race-based beliefs about a group -- such as “Native people have a spiritual energy” or “Black people are more authentic” -- if held by an outsider. (Read about the evolution of the term “racism” [here](#).)

Anti-racism (n): Continuously working to identify and eliminate racism by changing systems, organizations, policies, practices and attitudes so that power is justly redistributed. ([Source](#), with modifications.)

Microaggression (n): The everyday, sometimes subtle interactions or behaviors that -- often unintentionally -- communicate or result from some sort of bias toward a marginalized group. There are two cardinal differences between a microaggression and a macroaggression (a more overt or extreme instance of bias): (1) a microaggressor is generally unaware that their action or statement stems from bias, and (2) viewed in isolation, a single microaggression might be perceived as less egregious than, for example, using an epithet or denying someone a job due to their marginalized identity. However, given the frequency of microaggressions and the extent to which they go unaddressed, their cumulative effect can be extremely burdensome and damaging. ([Source](#), with extensive modifications and additions.) [Here are some examples](#) of common microaggressions in a classroom context.

Privilege (n): A special, unearned advantage or immunity available only to a particular group of people due to their perceived race, sex, religion, gender identity, sexuality, nationality, ability, class, age, body type or facial characteristics. Members of a privileged group often view their social, cultural, and economic experiences as the norm, rather than as facets of their privilege. Some examples from Peggy McIntosh’s *White Privilege and Male Privilege* are listed [here](#). ([Source](#), with modifications.)

Practices Essential to Allyship

Engage in Self-Examination and Self-Education

Acknowledge and explore the contours of your own privilege and biases, and educate yourself continuously about the role of race in society, your community, the institutions you're a part of and your personal experience.

Exploring Your Own Privilege

Did previous generations of your family have access to anything that was legally and systematically denied to Black people or members of other marginalized groups -- for example, high-quality education, desirable real estate, mortgages or other forms of credit at fair rates, minimal contact with police, union membership or high-status/high-paying employment? If so, how have these advantages affected your opportunities and life outcomes? Your safety net? Your social and professional networks and connections?

Does your race/ethnicity affect your experience of law enforcement? How many interactions have you had with law enforcement throughout your life? What were they like? How do you feel when you are around police? Stopped by police? Have you ever worried that requesting help from the police would put you or your family/friends at risk of physical harm or death? Have you ever judged a person of another race for reacting differently to law enforcement than you would have? Why do you think they might have reacted differently?

Does your race/ethnicity affect your experiences in public spaces? What is it like for you to go shopping? Stay at hotels/Airbnbs? Eat at restaurants? Travel or participate in public recreation? How often do you feel like you have to dress or behave in a way that is uncomfortable to you in order to be treated decently in these contexts? How frequently are you followed or questioned by staff or security? In general, how are you treated by clerks and other customer-facing employees? What is their attitude toward you when you request assistance? Have you judged a person of another race for reacting or behaving differently in these settings than you would? Can you think of any possible explanations for their reactions?

Does your race/ethnicity affect your experience of your workplace or education institutions? How frequently do people question your qualifications for the institutions you belong to? How frequently do you worry that they will? How frequently do you feel like you have to suppress or modify aspects of your personality or appearance in order to be respected or trusted in these settings? Does it feel like an uphill battle to gain respect/trust in these settings, or do you feel like you're met with a baseline level of trust and respect at the outset? How often do you feel like you have to exceed work or academic expectations in order to gain respect or trust? Have you ever judged a person of another race for behaving or reacting differently in these contexts than you would? Can you think of any possible explanations for their reactions or behavior?

Exploring Your Own Biases

Do you ever make any race-based assumptions about the interests, preferences, beliefs, background or intelligence of your peers/colleagues of other races? Have you ever avoided or

pursued a specific topic of conversation with someone due to their race? If so, why? Have you ever modified your accent, mannerisms or word choice around someone due to their race? Have you ever sought approval, reassurance, advice or assistance from someone due to their race? How many Black friends do you have? How many of them are you certain would list you as a friend? How frequently are you romantically interested in or attracted to people of other races? What other races? Are there any notable exclusions? Have you ever chosen to consult a Black or Latinx doctor, therapist, lawyer, accountant or other professional? Have you ever intentionally avoided consulting a doctor or other professional due to their race? If so, why? Have you ever had difficulty trusting someone in any other context due to their race? Have you ever feared someone due to their race?

Self-Education

Think about your answers to some of the questions above. What, if anything, do they reveal about your privilege? Do they suggest any race-based misunderstandings or biases (conscious or unconscious) on your part? If so, what is the source of that bias and how can you work on unlearning it? How can you redistribute some of the benefits of your privilege? How can you use your privilege to disrupt the cycle of systemic racism?

That's where self-education comes in. We can't depend on members of marginalized groups to tell us what to do or how to think about race, or to explain the many ways racial injustice manifests in society. That is far too much work to expect of someone who is likely already heavily burdened by the systemic oppression we're seeking to understand and dismantle.

One way to start is by reading the rest of this guide and poking through the resource lists on page 8. Pick a few things to read, watch or listen to, and take action based on what you learn. Then, explore more resources and take further action. Again, this is a lifelong process. You can also reach out to an ally/accomplice group like [SURI](#) or talk to other people who appear to be committed to the work of allyship.

Confront Racism in Your Personal and Professional Spheres

Confronting Racist Actions and Statements

Be ready to call out racist statements or actions that you witness or learn about in your community or institutions. Generally, the best way to do this is by (1) briefly and clearly explaining what you believe happened, (2) sharing your thoughts and/or feelings about it, (3) explaining what you'd like to happen next and in the future. ([Source](#), with modifications). This can be murky territory, and approaching it recklessly could cause additional harm to the person or group you're seeking to support (for example, if there is backlash, they may be the target instead of / in addition to you), so it's very important to try to get a sense of what the harmed party is comfortable with before you proceed. If you believe it's necessary to address the situation immediately, you may still be able to check in first with a quick text or a brief side conversation (e.g. "Hey, I'm thinking of calling out / pushing back on what just happened. Are you comfortable with that? If not, totally understand. If so, do you have a preference for whether I do it now or later / publicly or privately?"). Suggestions for how to navigate these types of situations can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

If you witness someone being actively harassed, you may need to take a different approach. Tips specific to intervening in harassment can be found [here](#).

Confronting Racist Systems and Policies

Racism is commonly embedded in institutional policies and practices in areas such as recruiting, hiring, admission, promotion, retention, salaries and financial aid, assignments, appointments, networking opportunities, programming and support. Often, problems of access, representation and fairness in these contexts are not overt, so it's important for allies to proactively identify them, and then, of course, work toward equitable change.

Suggestions for addressing institutional racism in the workplace can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Steps institutions of higher education can take to address institutional racism can be found [here](#). An example of a call for institutional reform in the law school context can be found [here](#). Information relevant to the legal profession more generally can be found [here](#).

Take Political Action

Allyship is not only about solidarity in your immediate sphere. It also requires consistent participation in and support of social activism. Here are some ways you can get involved:

Engage in Local Politics

Local politics is where a lot of the overlooked action happens. Find out what activist groups in your area are fighting for/against and get plugged into their efforts. Here are a few local and regional grassroots organizations doing work that focuses on or intersects with racial justice:

- [ACCE Action](#)
- [AWARE LA](#)
- [Black Lives Matter LA](#)
- [CHIRLA](#)
- [Critical Resistance LA](#)
- [Defend Boyle Heights](#)
- [Dignity & Power Now](#)
- [Ground Game LA](#)
- [Immigrant Youth Coalition](#)
- [JusticeLA](#)
- [LA Community Action Network](#)
- [LA Forward](#)
- [LA Tenants Union](#)
- [National Lawyers Guild LA](#)
- [Street Watch LA](#)
- [Youth Justice LA](#)

Donate & Spread Awareness

Amplify or contribute money to organizations doing work that advances racial justice. The groups listed above are always in need of support and social media buzz, but lists of other worthy organizations can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Share Space and Amplify Marginalized Voices

True allyship requires sacrifice, which includes sharing -- or giving up -- opportunities afforded by your privilege. When you are considered for decision-making roles or other impactful opportunities in your school, workplace, etc., consider how well people with marginalized identities (and particularly Black, Indigenous and Latinx people) are represented in those positions. If they are underrepresented, where possible, recommend someone with a

marginalized identity to take your place or join you, and advocate for changes in the recruitment process / selection criteria that would result in more diversity.

Take Cues from Those You Seek to Support

To be an effective ally, you must listen to and take direction from the communities you fight alongside. Don't make assumptions about what would be helpful in a given situation -- find out what is already being done, and ask those most impacted how you can be of use. If asking would be an imposition under the circumstances, make a plan yourself, but be sure to run it by an impacted party first. If that's not possible, then do research and seek advice from other allies before you take action. You are not here to be a hero, a savior or a leader, you are here to be an accomplice.

Accept Criticism and Discomfort

Regardless of your intentions, you may sometimes fall short as an ally and do, say or overlook something in a way that causes offense. Accepting criticism and reacting constructively to discomfort is a multifaceted process that generally requires the following steps:

Acknowledgement: Take accountability when you've caused identity-based harm or offense to a member of a marginalized group, but avoid focusing the acknowledgement on your intentions -- the focus should always be on the harm caused, whether or not you meant well. If you are called out publicly, it may be best to take accountability publicly in order to promote recognition that the harm was/is real, but if possible, check with the harmed party first.

Apology and Correction: Apologize authentically and do what you can to rectify the harm, where possible.

Commitment to Change: Make clear that you will take steps to avoid repeating the harmful behavior in the future, specify what those steps are where appropriate, and follow through.

Forgoing Comfort: It can be painful and embarrassing to be called out for racism or other forms of identity-based harm/bias. These kinds of growing pains are natural, but remember that your emotions are secondary to the issue at hand. Do not divert attention to them, and do not seek reassurance or forgiveness from those you've harmed (or anyone else who shares their identity). Otherwise, you risk exacerbating the burden you've already imposed.

Guidance Specific to Law School

Brief: [How to Practice Anti-Racism in Law School](#) (Law School Toolbox)

Thorough: [Intro to Anti-Racism and Allyship](#) (Duke Law Coalition for Anti-Racist Action)

Potential Pitfalls

The process of allyship requires a lifetime of learning and often involves difficult judgement calls. You will inevitably make mistakes, and that's fine, as long as you take responsibility, do

what you can to repair the damage and commit to being more careful in the future. That said, the following pitfalls are especially important to avoid if you're serious about the work:

Performative Allyship/Activism

Performative allyship is marked by superficial gestures or statements of solidarity that do little but bolster one's own image as "woke" or "on the right side" of an issue. This kind of "activism" rings hollow to those burdened by oppression, and can also cause harm. Read more about the nature and dangers of performative allyship [here](#).

Comparing Oppressions

You may have experienced forms of identity-based oppression yourself, but that does not give you a real understanding of the oppression faced by those with whom you seek allyship. By definition, they belong to a group of which you are not a part. Your position on the matrix of oppression is therefore *necessarily* different from theirs, and you are privileged in some ways in which they are not. Some version of the reverse may (or may not) be true as well, but as allies, we are focused on deploying our specific brand of privilege to fight the oppressions of those who do not share our identity, not on denying that privilege as a means of "relating" to their experiences or, worse, claiming entitlement to their spaces/opportunities.

Taking Credit for the Work of Others

This should be self-explanatory. If ideas you share or promote have a specific source, cite it. If you participate in activism initiated and/or led by others, do not misrepresent your role. If you received help with or advice about an anti-racist effort, acknowledge it.

Unsolicited "Support" or "Leadership"

See above under "Take Cues from Those You Seek to Support" (p. 6).

Overlooking Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the interplay between multiple identities claimed by or assigned to a single person or group. This interplay can, and often does, correspond to unique forms of oppression. For example, the forms of oppression experienced by a Black cis straight man are different from those experienced by a Black straight cis woman, which are different from those experienced by a Black queer or gender-nonconforming person, which are different from those experienced by an Indigenous queer or gender-nonconforming person, and so forth. As an ally, it's important to consider and seek to learn about these differences and their implications. More on intersectionality can be found [here](#).

Seeking or Expecting Recognition/Gratitude

The work of allyship is a duty, not a favor. Seeking recognition for it implies otherwise. Importantly, "seeking" does not always involve explicitly demanding or even requesting. It

can be as subtle as making unsolicited references to your anti-racism around members of marginalized groups in the hopes of being appreciated or viewed as virtuous.

Assuming Members of Marginalized Groups Want to Talk About Injustice

Are you always in the mood to talk about the various ways you are burdened by society? Probably not, so don't assume anyone else is. As a result of your work as an ally, you might have injustice on your mind more than you're used to, but that doesn't mean it has to be a topic of conversation with everyone it affects. They live it -- let them decide if and when to bring it up in casual conversation. Defaulting to conversations about racism with people of color can also imply an assumption that they are constantly beleaguered or indignant. At the risk of stating the obvious, people of all identities contain multitudes, including joy and flourishing and just wanting to talk about *Real Housewives* or the *Unsolved Mysteries* reboot.

False Expressions of Belonging / Cultural Appropriation

Do not overestimate the extent to which you are "in community" with people who do not share your identity. Whether or not you have similar interests or tastes, it's very unlikely that you share more foundational, life-defining experiences. By adopting mannerisms or styles associated with another cultural identity, you are exploiting that identity as an accessory to attract attention or cultivate a "vibe," but without incurring the associated disadvantages. That is a form of cultural appropriation. More information can be found [here](#).

Addressing Misconceptions about Race

Here are a few resources for countering common misconceptions about race, primarily (though not exclusively) as they relate to criminal justice:

Talking Points & Explainers

- [From the Duke Law Coalition for Anti-Racist Action](#)
- [From The National Abolition Hall of Fame](#)
- [From The Work](#)
- [From Do Something](#)
- [From In Style](#)

Longform Articles

- [From the Washington Post \(Radley Balko\)](#)
- [From the Boston Globe \(Aubrey Clayton\)](#)
- [From the Atlantic \(Ta-Nehisi Coates\)](#)
- [From Vox \(interview w/ Nikole Hannah-Jones\)](#)

Resource Guides for Further Reading/Viewing/Listening

- [From Black Feminist Collective](#)
- [From Case Western \(scaffolded\)](#)
- [From Drake](#)
- [From Harvard](#)
- [From Haymarket Books](#)
- [From Ibram X. Kendi](#)
- [From Justice in June](#)
- [From Laura Smith via Medium](#)
- [From No Name Book Club](#)
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Sources

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