

WANT TO BE A WHITE ALLY?

**In the Fight against racial injustice, it's easy to talk.
Here's what's really needed – if you're ready to do the work.**

Hartford Courant INSIGHT: Sunday, May 2, 2021

Anita Davis, inaugural vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion at Trinity College in Hartford. As a clinical/community psychologist, she brings a strength-based, collaborative and action-oriented approach to her work.

Days after the jury convicted Derek Chauvin in the murder of George Floyd, one would think the feeling in the pit of my stomach would have left. The truth is it hasn't. And as a Black woman in America with an adult, Black son over 6 feet tall, I don't know if it ever will. As a licensed psychologist who has helped people cope with pain and trauma for more than 20 years, I understand that the distress caused by this trial and the ones to come don't just go away with a guilty verdict.

As vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion at a predominately white institution, I embrace the notion that systemic change will not and cannot occur unless we have white allies engaged in racial justice work, too. I am also keenly aware that, regardless of the outcome, anti-Black racism will persist beyond this trial. While I am truly appreciative of white people who readily express their commitment is that some white allies can often be the biggest impediments to progress.

I name this truth because talented Black people are being recruited into predominately white spaces and being sold the lie of genuine institutional commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Weeks, months or years later, we find ourselves exhausted from trying to fight anti-Black racism at a systemic level while also confronting white people (usually in positions of power) who say they are on board, but really have little understanding of what that truly means. Representation is only one part of racial justice, equity and inclusion. So, if white allies are ready to do the work, these are some of the needed actions. These suggestions are based on my 30 years of experience working collaboratively with all people to promote racial and social justice.

- **Listen and act, don't just talk.** Resist the urge to consistently share with your Black friends and colleagues all your ideas about what needs to be done to make the world a better place for Black people. This does not make you an ally. And, frankly, it is not helpful. Instead, offer to help, ask what kind of help is needed, and then follow through. Or show up and join efforts aimed at dismantling systemic racism in your community.
- **Help other white people recognize racism.** Courageous white allies don't remain silent when witnessing a racial microaggression. When you're in that meeting, and that thing is said by another white person, and you recognize it from the list of microaggressions that you've read, or heard Black people talk about, do something to address it. White allies must be vocal if they want to be agents of change. Be open to change. Phrases such as "this is how we've always done it," "fit," and "we have to be careful not to offend [fill in the blank]," have come up repeatedly in my various workplaces. These words are often preceded by a phrase such as "I'm all for diversity and racial justice," followed by a "but," which makes it clear that diversity and racial justice are not being taken seriously. True allies understand that if we continue to do things the same way or continue to ask Black people to be patient, this is the best way to make sure things will remain the same.
- **Educate yourself.** Please stop asking your Black friends and colleagues to educate you on everything Black. We're not homogeneous, and one Black person's truth is not the truth for all Black people. Do some research to show that you've spent time trying to learn more about the complexity of Black people's experiences, and then ask if this person is open to a conversation.
- **Return to the uncomfortable conversation.** Accept that you're going to make mistakes in this work because you are human and that this will cause discomfort. A Black colleague, friend, family member or partner is eventually going to tell you that you've made a mistake if they value the relationship. What you do after they tell you that you've committed a racial microaggression or macroaggression determines if you're really an ally. It's OK to ask for time to process. But, if you don't return to the conversation, you've forfeited the proverbial ally card.

So, as we prepare ourselves for where we go from here, it is important to pause and ask, "How will you approach your next ally moment?"