



## **Do's and Do Not's of Showing Up for Racial Justice**

Wisdom for white people ...

The following do's and do not's of showing up for racial justice come out of a panel presentation and discussion sponsored by TSURJ in Durham, NC, in October 2017. The three invited panelists wove a wonderful web of wisdom for those of us who had come to listen and learn. Here is some of what they had to offer:

### **Martha Hernandez**

Comité de Accion Popular

- Show up for exchange (not education or “fixing”) because everybody is bringing something.
- It's about being responsible and accountable; it's not about feeling guilty.
- I can see your body language and how you welcome me even if I can't speak your language. Welcome people with your humanity. Be human.
- We do not need allies for cheerleading. We need you to build relationships based in understanding the situation, in putting yourself in the other person's shoes. When you are in relationship, then you know what leadership to follow; if I am in a place where I don't know anybody, of course I'm not going to know what to do.
- Communication is essential. Show that you know your comfort comes at the expense of people in Mexico, the lives and health of the people of Mexico.
- Be ready to take action that undocumented people may not be able to take because of the risk. Understand the risk of any action to undocumented immigrants (and/or to any Person or Community of Color). When you take action, follow the plan that the undocumented community has made; they are the ones who understand the risk the best.
- Reflect on what is changing in your head and your mind that makes it possible for us to walk together ... or are we just going to meet at the next march? Think about what you are doing in between the actions. Don't wait until the next act of racism; be about creating relationships that are strong and long-lasting.

## **Manju Rajendran**

### Ready The Ground and Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance

- Too often white people don't do anything because they fear messing up. Act with intention knowing you will make mistakes. Take action anyway. The hope is not that people will never make mistakes; that is unrealistic and harmful to the movement.
- Stay centered in the value that we won't leave anyone behind. This means taking the time to frame a vision and approach everyone can live with. This also means stopping to listen when Black and Brown organizations are trying to work out tensions.
- Talk about sexism and queerness as central to anti-racist struggles. Racism is always a gendered project. Black Lives Matter was created by Queer Women of Color.
- Avoid the pitfall of ego arguments about who is the leader and demonizing new people because they are new and making mistakes. We need to pull each other aside when we mess up rather than cast people out.
- Do not escalate the action in ways that are unplanned and escalate the risk for undocumented people (or other POC) without a chance for people to determine what level of risk they are willing and want to take. I have seen white people ask for consent to take risks in solidarity with POC; recognize the differing levels of risk we take when we put our bodies on the line and honor the voices of those taking the most risk. Show up ferociously for each other with permission.
- Build deep unity without ignoring the differences in power and privilege that we bring to the table.
- Build deep unity and relationships that help you navigate the tension between taking up too much space and being willing to take risks. Know the history and the organizational terrain, cultivate a practice of curiosity, humility, and accountability so when you make mistakes, you can receive feedback with some lightness.
- Organize with the understanding that white working class people have the most to gain from multiracial alliance.

## **Anthony Maglione**

### Durham for All

- Talk about accountability in terms of multiple identities; forcing people to choose one identity can feel restrictive in terms of bringing our full selves. Be aware how other intersecting identities are showing up -- class, sexual orientation, think about accountability in terms of these intersections.
- Explore for ourselves our own self-interest as white people and be clear about that. If we come with an attitude of helping, we don't understand the harm we do and the

harm being done to ourselves out of our conditioning. Reframe our story of why we do this work for our own benefit, for our own stake.

- Call in those of us making mistakes or embarking on activism for the first time without shaming; we need everyone.
- Be part of building a unified political strategy and vision to defeat the right. We need leaders from working class and POC communities to shape and craft and push forward a vision.
- Accountability to each other can be challenging when we don't know who to turn to; so get clear about who to build relationships with, who the enemy is and how you are going to work accountably to defeat them.
- Always be aware that white people have more resources to show up.
- Remember that relationship building with those in the middle is a long-term project.