

Code of Ethics for Antiracist White Allies

By JLove Calderon and Tim Wise

We are persons classified as white who oppose racism and the system of white supremacy. As such, we are committed to challenging the individual injustices and institutional inequities that exist as a result of racism, and to speaking out whenever and wherever it exists. We are also committed to challenging our own biases, inculcated by a society that has trained all white people, including us, to one degree or another, to internalize notions of our own superiority.

As antiracist allies, we seek to work with people of color to create real multiracial democracy. We do not aspire to lead the struggle for racial justice and equity, but rather, to follow the lead of persons and communities of color and to work in solidarity with them, as a way to obtain this goal. We do not engage in the antiracist struggle on behalf of people of color, so as to "save" them, or as an act of charity. We oppose and seek to eradicate white supremacy because it is an unjust system, and we believe in the moral obligation of all persons to resist injustice. Likewise, we believe not only that a system of white supremacy damages people of color but also that it compromises *our* humanity, weakens the democratic bonds of a healthy society, and ultimately poses great risks to us all. Because we believe white supremacy to be a contributing force to war, resource exploitation, and economic injustice, our desire to eradicate the mindset and system of white domination is fundamentally a matter of collective preservation. Though people of color are the direct targets of this system, we believe that white people are the collateral damage, and so for our own sake as well, we strive for a new way of living.

To do this with integrity, we believe it will be helpful to operate with a code of ethics in mind, so as to remain as accountable as possible to people of color and to each other, as we challenge white supremacy. We know from experience how easy it can be to act

with the best of intentions and yet ultimately do harm to the antiracist struggle by choosing tactics or methods that reinforce privilege and inequity, rather than diminish them, or by acting within the confines of an echo chamber of other antiracist white allies, while failing to ground our efforts in structures of accountability led by people of color.

In recent years, the number of white folks engaged in one form or another of public antiracist work or work around the subject of white privilege (as scholars, writers, activists, organizers and educators) has proliferated. Likewise, schools, non-profit organizations, and even some corporations have begun to look at matters of racism and white privilege within their institutions. As this work expands at many different levels, it is perhaps more necessary than ever that white people who are working to be strong antiracist allies take a good look in the mirror, analyze and critique what we do as well as how we do it, and ask: How can we, as antiracist white allies, operate ethically and responsibly as we work toward helping to dismantle white supremacy?

To this end, we propose the following code of ethics for antiracist white allies. Though it is hardly an exclusive or exhaustive list, we believe it is a start toward a more responsible and responsive antiracist practice for white persons who wish to act in solidarity with people of color in the battle against racism. The code should not be viewed as a fixed or final document, let alone as a checklist or “rulebook” for responsible antiracists. It is merely a guidepost. We hope that it will lead to productive reflection, discussion, and even healthy debate among those who are engaged in antiracist struggle.

Code of Ethics for AntiRacist White Allies

1. Acknowledge our racial privilege.

Self-reflection matters. So does public acknowledgement. Although there are many ways in which white people can be marginalized in this society (on the basis of gender, sex, sexuality, class, religion, disability, etc.), this truth does not eradicate our racial advantage relative to people of color. As white people, we can be oppressed in these other categories and still benefit from privileges extended to white people. Acknowledging racial privilege doesn't mean that we haven't worked hard or that there weren't barriers we had to overcome; it simply means that our racial identity helped us along the way. Indeed, racial privilege will even work in our favor as we speak out against racism. We will often be taken more seriously in this work *precisely* because we are white, and we should be clear on that point.

2. Develop interpersonal connections and structures to help maintain antiracist accountability.

Accountability matters. When we engage in antiracist efforts, be they public or private, we should remember that it is people of color most affected by racism, and thus, they have the most to gain or lose as a result of how such work is done. With this in mind, we believe it is important to seek and obtain regular and ongoing feedback from people of color in our lives (friends and/or colleagues), as a way to better ground our efforts in structures of accountability. Although this kind of accountability may play out differently, depending on our specific job or profession, one general principle is that we should be in regular and ongoing contact with persons in the communities that are most impacted by racism and white supremacy—namely, people of color.

3. Be prepared to alter our methods and practices when and if people of color give feedback or offer criticism about our current methods and practices.

Responsive listening matters. It's not enough to be in contact with people of color as we go about our work. We also need to be prepared to change what we're doing if and when people of color suggest there may be problems, practically or ethically, with our existing methods of challenging racism. Although accountability does not require that we agree with and respond affirmatively to every critique offered, if people of color are telling us over and over again that something is wrong with our current practices, accountability requires that we take it seriously and correct the practice. And, all such critiques should be seen as opportunities for personal reflection and growth.

4. Listening to constructive feedback from other white people, too.

Community matters. Particularly as we work to reach a broad base of white people, we need to listen to feedback from the people we are working with. White privilege tends to breed individualism, and this plays out in the form of white antiracists distancing ourselves from other white people and competition between antiracist whites to be the "most down." Listening to feedback from each other as white people helps to counter that tendency, and encourages us to collectivity.

5. If we speak out about white privilege, racism, and/or white supremacy, whether in a public forum or in private discussions with friends, family, or colleagues, we should acknowledge that people of color have been talking about these subjects for a long time and yet have been routinely ignored in the process.

Giving credit matters. Because many white people have tuned out or written off the observations of people of color, when another white person speaks about social and racial injustice it can be a huge “aha!” moment for the previously inattentive white listener. The speaker may be put on a pedestal. We should make sure people know that whatever wisdom we possess on the matter is only partially our own: it is also the collective wisdom of people of color, shared with us directly or indirectly. Likewise, beyond merely noting the general contribution of people of color to our own wisdom around matters of race, we should make the effort to specify those people of color and communities of color from whom we’ve learned. Encourage others to dig deeper into the subject matter by seeking out and reading/listening to the words/work of those people of color, so as to further their own knowledge base.

6. Share access and resources with people of color whenever possible.

Networking matters. As whites, we often enjoy access to various professional connections, resources, or networks from which people of color are typically excluded. The ability to act as a gatekeeper comes with the territory of privilege. The only question is, will we help open the gates wider or keep them closed? As allies, we should strive to share connections and resources with people of color whenever possible. So, for instance, we may have inroads for institutional funding or grant monies that could be obtained for people of color-led community organizations. We may have connections in media, educational institutions, or even the corporate world, which if shared with people of color could provide opportunities for those people of color to gain a platform for their own racial justice efforts.

7. If you get paid to speak out about white privilege, racism, and/or white supremacy or in some capacity make your living from challenging racism, donate a portion of your income to organizations led principally by people of color.

Giving back matters. Although it is important to speak out about racism and to do other types of antiracism work (organizing, legal work, teaching, etc.) and necessary for people to be paid for the hard work they do, whites who do so still have to admit that we are able to reap at least some of the financial rewards we receive because of racism and white privilege. Because so much of our own understanding of race and racism comes from the collective wisdom of people of color, it is only proper that we should give back to those who have made our own “success” possible. Although there is no way to ascertain the real value of the shared and collective wisdom of people of color on the understanding that white allies have about racism, it seems fair to suggest that *at least* 10 percent of our honorariums, royalties, salaries, or other forms of income should be shared with people-of-color-led organizations with a commitment to racial and social justice. It would be especially helpful if at least some of that money goes to locally-based, grassroots organizations that often have a hard time getting funding from traditional sources.

8. Get involved in a specific, people of color-led struggle for racial justice.

Organizing matters. If we are not fighting against police brutality, against environmental dumping in communities of color, or for affirmative action, for immigrant rights, for access to health care, or for antiracist policies and practices within our own institutions and communities, what are we modeling? How are we learning? What informs our work? Can we be accountable to communities of color if we are not politically involved ourselves in some aspect of antiracist struggle?

9. Stay Connected to White Folks, Too

Base-building matters. In addition to our roles in active solidarity with people of color, white people involved in racial justice work also need to reach out to other white people to broaden the base of antiracist white people. Unless we do the latter, we fall short in our accountability. Accountability means showing up, not just with ourselves, but with more white people each time.

10. Connect antiracism understanding to current political struggles, and provide suggestions or avenues for white people to get involved

Accessibility matters. We can connect the participants in our networks, classes, and trainings to opportunities for ongoing political work. We can bring current grassroots political struggles into our activism, education, and organizing by addressing the issues that people of color tell us most directly affect their lives. We can give tools and resources for getting involved in the issues the participants identify as most immediate for them, whether those be public policy issues such as immigration, affirmative action, welfare, or health care; or workplace, neighborhood, and community issues, such as jobs, education, violence, and toxic waste. After contact with us, people who we come into contact with should be able to connect directly and get involved with specific current struggles led by individuals and groups with a clear antiracist analysis.

The premise of this code is simple: White people have a moral and practical obligation to challenge racism in a responsible and responsive manner. To this end, we believe that the principles of self-reflection, accountability, responsive listening, building community, giving credit, resource sharing, giving back, organizing, base building, and

accessibility are important starting points for whites who are engaged in any kind of efforts to eradicate racism and white supremacy. We hope that this code, devised as a set of suggestions and guideposts for white allies, will prompt constructive dialogue and discussion regarding how white allyship can best be developed and deployed for the purpose of building true multiracial democracy.

A note about how this code was created:

The initial code concept was created by JLove, who then joined with Tim. Together they wrote the first draft of the code. That draft was sent out to a multi-racial, intergenerational group of activists, organizers, educators, artists, and everyday people who care deeply about social and racial justice. Input was given, and the authors took key insights and common themes and incorporated them into the editing process. Another round of feedback was led by Paul Kivel. We thank everyone who took the time to bring their wisdom and expertise to the table for this accountability work.