



MENU

8 Lessons from “The Future of Solidarity: How White People Can Support the Movement for Black Lives”

By [admin](#) On April 18, 2016 · [Add Comment](#) · In [News](#)

NOTE: The quotes below have been edited slightly with the speakers’ permission. Please do not use quotes from this piece without directly contacting the speaker and asking for their permission.

1. We need to be working toward a bold and powerful vision for liberation, not just an end to police murder.

DEVONTÉ JACKSON: We want to end the state sanctioned war against Black people. And so that’s not only manifested in police murder...When it comes to income, homeownership, wealth, and unemployment, Black people are facing highly unequal, inequitable outcomes in those areas. That’s part of a history relating way back to slavery. We’ve been in a permanent under-caste in society. We need a radical revolutionary vision to actually improve the conditions of Black people in the country. For me, that means that we have to abolish some systems of oppression. And a lot of folks in Black Lives Matter have been talking about this, abolishing the system of policing, abolishing the prison industrial complex, abolishing the military industrial complex. We want to envision a world without borders. We’ve been really pushing a radical, radically inclusive society for our communities, for the world really...That means also we’re going to have to be invested in creating systems, creating alternatives, to make thriving communities, to make a democracy that works for all of us. Since Black people have been here [in the U.S.], this democratic and economic system have not represented us. It hasn’t included us. It hasn’t recognized our humanity as people. And so the vision that we’re working towards is housing for all people. And it’s putting people in power over the economy not the richest few. We live in a world where the top 62 people own half of the world’s wealth. We need to dismantle that capitalist system that creates that wide range of inequality. And also we have to look for safety beyond policing. Black Alliance for Just Immigration has a campaign in New York really emphasizing how we can make our community safe without guns, without the presence of

police, without militarism. We can create a safe world, safe communities, by being in solidarity with each other. By trusting each other, by not looking at the next person as the other, as someone to be feared, as someone that is different. And that's really what's driving the killings of Black people. It's this implicit fear of the Black body. And so..we're going to have to really dig down and look towards a revolutionary vision that really centers the folks who are at the margins of our democracy and at the margins of our economy, and center them in the struggle. And that's the only way that we can make real change that's substantive, that's really going to improve the conditions of people. Wealthy people are controlling our democracy...So what are we going to do to aggressively challenge that? I think it takes investing in the Black Lives Matter movement. Investing in revolutionary struggles right here and abroad that really challenges U.S. imperialism and U.S. capitalism.

2. We must directly support Black organizations.

We are proud to say that this collaborative event raised \$8000 for the local Black Lives Matter chapter!

DEVONTÉ JACKSON: Grace Lee Boggs said an “American revolution is not going to happen without Black struggle.” And that's very significant to me...For Black folks in this time of increased violence on our lives, police brutality, police murder, we needed a space for us to heal and also to conspire together as Black people...So it's important to resource Black organizations. Investing in communities who are doing organizing on the ground...There's not that many all-Black organizations. And then the ones we have tend to be under resourced within the nonprofit industrial complex.

ROBBIE CLARK: The resourcing of Black organizations and Black organizing is really, really critical....As much y'all can play the role of Robin Hood and put that money into Black organizing. And thinking beyond financial resources is great. What are other types of resources [skills, volunteer time, access to non-financial resources] that folks have to offer to serve Black organizing?

3. Intersectional analysis and the leadership of women, queer and trans people are one of the core strengths of Black Lives Matter.

ROBBIE CLARK: What Black leadership looks like is extremely different right now. Like when you look at Black Lives Matter, you have three Black women who started that. This isn't a movement that is led by or started by one charismatic leaders who is a cisgender Black man. So you're talking about taking leadership from young people, you're talking about taking leadership from queer people, you're talking about taking leadership from women. So in addition to checking your privilege around your race, you need to check your privilege around your gender and possibly around your class and possibly around your own gender and your own cis privilege. So there's a few layers that folks have to check in order to make yourself open and be able to actually hear what it is that is coming from folks who are in leadership.

JANETTA JOHNSON: This is a struggle for people's lives. All Black lives. And that includes Black lives [of people] with mental health [issues]. That includes Black trans lives. That means Black lives that are incarcerated and getting out of incarceration...Black trans women were at the beginning of the stages of Black Lives Matter and were included in a way that traditionally we have not been included. And I feel like this is our only hope for any type of safe visibility and safety within the community. And I feel like we're sort of banking on the Black Lives Matter movement to uplift ourselves as humans, as we've been dehumanized in so many ways.

4. White activists need to strike a balance between accountability to Black organizers and taking initiative.

DEVONTÉ JACKSON: A challenge has been this balancing act of centering Black leadership and then taking initiative in getting things done without necessarily Black folks leading the way. Sometimes there is too much consultation. I feel like, in this moment, Black folks are really looked to lead. But there's also a big emphasis and the need for us to organize amongst our own community, so it became a challenge to have regular consultation with folks that are trying to engage in solidarity.

JANETTA JOHNSON: White folks, you don't need to come to me and ask me how can you be an ally. You need to go to your white folks and ask them because you're not going to hear it from me the way that it needs to be served to you...White folks who have been a part of the movement for Black lives for decades are the people you talk to if you have any questions about how to do this work. These are the people who have to school you. Don't come to me, because you will never understand my perspective.

ROBBIE CLARK: Start to identify what are the ways that white folks can still take the leadership of Black people but balance that with taking initiative at this moment and moving in a way that brings liberation for us all in society.

CLARE BAYARD: How can white people take initiative in a way that also takes some of the burden of labor off the Black folks who are working so hard to build this powerful movement, that they can be doing their work, and those of us who are white can be doing our work with getting our communities on board? I want to lift up a piece of wisdom from the group Asians for Black Lives, who put out these protocols about how they orient their work. One of them is: “Move boldly and swiftly. Take risks. Make mistakes. Share lessons. While we're committed to following Black leadership, we will also take the initiative to mobilize our communities and take responsibility for organizing our people to show up in this moment. We will use all of the diverse skills, resources, and cultural tools at our disposal. We will take risks, try new experiments in our organizing, and not be afraid of making mistakes while learning from mistakes that have already been made.” Meeting that bar is an awesome challenge for us.

5. There are lots of roles for white people to play in ending white supremacy, and we must move other white people who aren't already working for racial justice.

CLARE BAYARD: We all have roles to play in ending racism and ending white supremacy. White people are born and trained to be its primary defenders. That is what our role is supposed to be, whether we are active advocates or whether we're complicit through silence or passivity. If we're not moving against white supremacy, we are moving with it. We are supporting it...So for us, we need to be figuring out how we're going to turn around the agenda that's being used currently to recruit millions of white people. How do we move white people in our lives, in our families, our workplaces, our friends, our schools, and places of worship? The question is: How are we going to get more and more white people on board in active ways, committed for the long term?

CLARE BAYARD: Those of us that are not at the front lines of [racist] oppression need to recognize that we could put our energy much more productively into organizing our communities than into critiquing strategy and tactics coming from folks who are fighting for their lives, for their dignity. If you or someone that you're talking to is feeling uncomfortable or not really sure why folks are blocking the BART train, why people are blocking the bridge, why they're messing with your commute, then redirect that discomfort away from condemning tactics into really asking deeper questions about what are people dealing with that leads to a decision to block BART? Have conversations with people to help them move toward supporting the self determination of Black communities to choose how they are fighting for their freedom.

CLARE BAYARD: There's so many white people in motion for racial justice right now. I haven't seen anything like this in my lifetime. White people are responding to the resurgence of Black freedom movement in this country, which through every iteration has been such a shaping force for liberation. This is a powerful moment. And we need to get in there and figure out how to make full use of that.

ROBBIE CLARK: To get to our transformative vision, we're going to need everybody. We all have different roles to play. And we need more people, so the more that you can do to encourage and talk to folks and help to bring people on this journey on the side of humanity and of justice and, of like making sure that we just have a future and humans can survive on this planet, like it really is imperative that we really start to dig through and that we really start to have some of these struggles with each other.

ROBBIE CLARK: I really wanted to lift up Bay Area Solidarity Action Team's role in us helping to get the charges against the Black Friday 14 dropped. I feel like BASAT has played a huge and helpful role locally providing buffers between the police and Black folks when we're at actions. That's a simple day to day thing. We do a lot of direct action here in the Bay Area and White people supporting Black-led actions is important, but not everybody is going to be taking direct action. That might not be where your best contribution lies...Like Devonté said, we have some very transformative visions. And to get there, it's going take a combination of tactics...So I really want folks to think a lot about what are some of those other things. What's my point of intervention, what are my contributions that I'm going to be making? Maybe you're a teacher in the classroom or maybe you are a nurse or maybe you're a librarian. Whatever is your work, how is it that you're seeing racism show up? And what role and what responsibility are you taking as an individual that is fighting against white supremacy? What role are you taking to actually combat that in the ways that it comes up in your life?

6. We need to name and respond to the specificity of Black oppression.

ROBBIE CLARK: I think it's really important for us to look at and not be afraid of naming the problems of Black people. Like when we're talking about a problem of Black displacement in the Bay Area right now... [and because of discomfort related to privilege] someone will be like, 'oh OK, we're going to talk about Black displacement, and well, we can't forget to talk about Latinos, and we can't forget to talk about Asian people, we can't forget to talk about every other person of color.' Don't do that. There are different ways that different expressions of oppression impact different racial groups. Part of taking the leadership of Black folks is hearing that and being able to respond to that and not try to distract from the point of it being a specific Black issue. You've gotta let Black issues be Black issues. And that's just how they are.

7. These presidential elections are important. We need to out-organize Trump & Cruz.

ROBBIE CLARK: If you look at who are the frontrunners for Republicans, you're looking at Donald Trump, you're looking at Ted Cruz, you're looking at the most extremist of racist, right wing, white supremacists. This is a really significant moment...Because we've been doing the work of Black Lives Matter in the time when we've had a Black president. And while he's definitely not friendly with Black Lives Matter, he definitely hasn't been a direct enemy or brought down the power of the government or the state on our growing movement. And I think one of the things that historically troubles me is really thinking about the way that Black movements have been attacked in the past by the state.

CLARE BAYARD: White supremacy in this country was created in order to put us at each other's throats and to divide people who actually have a lot more in common with each other than any of us do with Trump. To be real, that dude is doing effective organizing. And we need to be real about what is he doing that's reaching out to people so that they think that he's actually working in their self-interest and to get real about how are we going to out organize him. Racism is now and has always been used as a really powerful wedge to get white people looking away from who is actually draining common resources, and who is creating actual threats—the ruling class. That's what we need to move people away from.

ROBBIE CLARK: Historically in relationship to elections, white solidarity with Black folks has looked like Black voter enfranchisement and white people making space for Black people historically to be able to vote. That was a lot of what happened in a lot of the Freedom Summers, right. And if you look at right now, that's actually a lot of what still needs to happen. Is a lot of white actions leading towards there being more space for Black people to organize on a national level...You know, I think that there is a lot of work that white folks need to do with each other to figure out- if I'm truly in solidarity with Black people, then what is my role? And how do we make sure that there's still the space for Black folks to fight for liberation? And what does it look like, kind of given what can be a significant change in the politics of the United States [with this election]? And then [also bring that thinking] to a local level.

8. Know your motivations for being in the work, make a lifelong

commitment, and make friends with discomfort

JANETTA JOHNSON: White people need to understand how urgent the situation is. If we don't do this work, we risk our live[s]. That's why we work so hard. But many white people treat activism and organizing like it's hobbies or jobs. This is not a job, it's not a hobby. This is a struggle for people's lives...White people need to analyze their motivations. If you're in this for yourselves, then that's not enough. This is not charity. This is community-building work. Be more committed and intentional to the cause. And make this a lifelong decision to commit towards social justice and healing...I have to look at my lineage and the trauma that I historically faced. However, I also want you to look at your lineage and look at the trauma that your folks have historically perpetuated on our folks. And there's something that needs to be fixed.

ROBBIE CLARK: As a white person in an anti-racist struggle, a struggle against white supremacy, you should pretty much always feel some level of discomfort...Part of white privilege is this need to feel comfortable because you're used to feeling comfortable. And I think that if you're feeling too comfortable, then you're not doing the work enough and you're not pushing yourself enough around really examining the privileges that you have. So you should learn to kind of sit with that discomfort. It'll be okay.

CLARE BAYARD: We need to be very clear about what it means, to be talking to other white people about why Black liberation matters for all of us, why Black people getting free is actually vital for all of us, including white people in this country...There is an ultimate self-interest for white communities in ending white supremacy. And that doesn't mean that we aren't going to have to give up privileges. There are things to give up. So then the question is, what is there to be gained through that? It doesn't work for us to allow the state and our society to dehumanize people in our communities, in our lives. That impact ripples out; there's a price to be paid for that. There's lives being lost. And there's souls being lost and material costs as well. The more that we can be talking to white people about the fact that we have very different stakes in this fight but we all have a stake, that helps us move into solidarity away from versions of white liberal racism and white savior tendencies.

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