

WHAT WHITE PEOPLE CAN DO NEXT

FROM ALLYSHIP TO COALITION

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Can Do Next

Over the years, I have had countless people ask me for advice on “allyship,” but until relatively recently I declined, beyond cursory responses. With most of my work to date, I have felt my creative energy was best placed centering on people of African descent, and I’ve been fascinated by Black Atlantic cultures for as long as I can remember. The Black Atlantic, a concept coined by Paul Gilroy in 1993, is a lens through which to explore blackness beyond the limits of the nation-state. The term incorporates the United States and the Atlantic coastline of Africa, as well as attending to the existence of Black European cultures that have been traditionally sidelined. For me, shining a light on something powerfully generative yet willfully obscured seemed far more useful and, quite frankly, fulfilling than focusing on “white” people, or instructing them on pointers to better recognize my humanity. Yet there has always been the assumption—generally from people racialized as white—that my interest is in “racism,” or indeed the word of the moment, “antiracism.” When I returned to Dublin during university holidays as an African Studies undergrad, after telling people what I was studying it wasn’t uncommon to be met with an

affronted, “Oh what, yeah, so you’re real anti-white then?” A baffling response, but one I encountered more frequently than you might imagine. Over the years this changed: the automatic assumption that I was a closet black supremacist declined, but suspected “anti-white” sentiment on my part was replaced with the belief that a degree in African Studies equated to studying antiracism. Recently, I recall having a public discussion in which we touched on Afrofuturism, philosophy, and ancestral veneration and its relationship to African concepts of time, as well as the trajectory between the blues and trap music. I enjoyed it immensely and found the interviewer’s questions refreshing. Apparently, not everyone felt the same way. At the end of the event, I was approached by a woman who worked in development somewhere in Africa. She said she enjoyed the conversation but felt it was a wasted opportunity; she wanted us to discuss allyship! My heart sank.

Now, through my experiences of being racialized as black in a homogeneously white society as well as through my studies, I *had* become an inadvertent expert in racism, and had learned that it was impossible to study African history without studying Europe, racism and colonialism, and a good dollop of white supremacy too! I did go on to write my PhD thesis on the construction of racial categories, but that was much later. I find it remarkable that an academic racialized as “white” studying, let’s say, English folklore would never be automatically assumed to have an

interest in “racism.” “White” people have not been overdetermined by their race, which is precisely why we have often witnessed scenes of obscene outrage in those moments when whiteness is pointed out and remarked upon. Recall the backlash, not to mention the complaints to Ofcom (the UK communications regulator), when the Channel 4 newscaster Jon Snow remarked that he’d “never seen so many white people in one place,” while describing a pro-Brexit rally. That outrage hasn’t gone away either, and the kickback against the Black Lives Matter protests has asserted itself in numerous ways, most pointedly in the British government’s threat to ban the teaching of what they term “critical race studies.”

But my reluctance to offer allyship advice was about more than all that. Honestly, the word “ally” itself jarred me; I didn’t—I still don’t—like it. The power dynamic it reproduces makes me feel icky, and I’ve seen way too many guides talking about the ally and the “victim.” In short, I find a lot of the discourse patronizing, both on a personal level and with regard to the prospective ally. It is not a world-making practice.

Indeed, I see a historic opportunity to reconfigure attitudes and reignite imaginations being squandered by an “antiracist” narrative that inadvertently reinforces much of what it claims to want to overcome, and that in many ways alienates people who might be otherwise persuaded.

One of the things that allyship fails to address is the

fact that you can continue to view black people as inferior while still being committed to their “protection.” When I remembered that many of the nineteenth-century antislavery abolitionists were themselves racists who held deep-seated beliefs about black inferiority, I felt even more uncomfortable with the whole “ally” movement. Where the abolitionists differed most from the racist slaveholders was in their response to how racial “inferiors” should be treated; on the belief in “inferiority” itself they were often in agreement.

In certain ways, today’s antiracists are the abolitionists of the twenty-first century. A commitment to allyship with black people doesn’t automatically mean you don’t think black people are somehow inferior: it means you don’t think they should be treated discriminatorily as a result. Moreover, the idea that antiracism is an act of grace that benefits the poor black victim obscures the psychological investment in, as well as the costs of, “whiteness,” the losses that are imbibed from its poisoned chalice, *for “white” people too*: “capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy have seduced and press-ganged people into servitude.”¹

Naming whiteness is necessary; it is the “invisibility” of white people, who are presented just as “people,” the default norm from which everyone else deviates, that is part of its normative power-making. Yet the more you state and claim your “whiteness,” *without doing any further work* to unpack what *that means*, the more you become fixed to that articulation of self, the more you become

wedded to whiteness. Some of the most racist societies have been ones with pronounced “white identities” that coexist vis-à-vis racialized others.

Unfortunately, much of the present “antiracist” conversation is ahistorical and lacking in this analysis. It is also generally devoid of analysis of class or capitalism, which it seems to have largely replaced with interpretations of interpersonal “privilege.” As such, I have very intentionally engaged with texts from earlier generations of intellectuals and activists whose work comes with a different set of priorities, aims that seem both clearer and more collective. The 1971 *Rap on Race* is a public conversation between two of the heavyweight public intellectuals of the time, the illuminating James Baldwin and the (somewhat aggravating) anthropologist Margaret Mead. Baldwin reminds us that one of the persistent “truths” of whiteness is that “all Europeans have a deadly temptation to feel a sense of biological superiority.”² Whiteness is always there, ever-present, determining who gets a chance and who is denied opportunity. But recently I have been starting to visualize it like a horror-film ghoul: it’s looming in the shadows, it’s threatening, but we can really activate, energize, and empower it by saying its name three times in the mirror. However, once evoked, what the fuck do we do with it? If we summon it and just leave it at large, free to run rampant and unchecked, it’s game over as we’re all subsumed by its murderous rampage. Much like the horror-film

baddie, we should invoke it only to slay it. Without that second, crucial part, we remain under siege, doing its bidding, in thrall to its promises and lies.

This is one of the numerous reasons I increasingly feel a sense of reluctance talking to, or about, a generic category of “white people.” This book is of course called *What White People Can Do Next*. While I wanted to create a concrete, practical resource, the title is also a provocation. Before the book was even written, I had “white” people tweeting me to tell me how offensive the title is. You see, there is still something taboo in addressing “white people,” and, despite antiracism becoming more mainstream than ever, there is still a reflex against naming whiteness. Nonetheless, it catches your attention, which is precisely the intention. We have to set whiteness up, to name it, to frame it, in order to disassemble it.

While of course there are parallels and experiential consistencies between people racialized as white, the differences that exist between “white people” in different parts of the world are also vast, before we even get into region, socioeconomic class, beliefs, or political allegiances. I think this diversity represents an opportunity to loosen the death grip of “whiteness,” a concept that was invented to flatten these differences in the first place.

Which is what we need, because in 2020, in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world changed. In the wake of the protests that followed the killing of

George Floyd, the proliferation of allyship guides became overwhelming. My old reservations resurfaced, but I also sensed a genuine commitment from a lot of white people to at least start to address centuries-old wounds that continue to infect the present. In response, I created an online resource called *What White People Can Do Next*. It seemed to resonate far and wide. This book is an expanded version of that.

As we reel through era-defining, world-making events, we find ourselves at the dawn of a civilization ready to be remade anew. Drawing together years of study and my personal experiences, as well as my reflections on a year like no other, I present this book as a proposal to usher in that new world.

Most of us, I'm sure, can sense that we're on the verge of something; whether or not that's teetering on the precipice of disaster, or glimpsing the threshold of a reimagined and just reality, the future feels like it's hanging in the balance. The direction we take is no less than the difference between life and death. To continue on the track we were traveling can only mean death. And we reject that. It is our resistance to death that brought us into the streets chanting "Black LIVES Matter." It is our resistance to death that has seen thousands assembling to protest against environmental desecration. Millions of us feel deeply that change is long overdue unless we are to succumb to death.

The same forces that have a disregard for black life,

for the lives of the indigenous, for the marginalized, for the lives of women, are the same forces who disregard the life of the Earth itself—individuals who see themselves set apart from other people, who imagine themselves disconnected from the natural world over which they shortsightedly assume mastery, who see the destruction and degradation of life as a fair exchange for the tightly policed boundaries of ethnonationalist identities, the pursuit of wealth, or the achievement of billionaire status.

All of this we reject. Out of this refusal, other worlds emerge mirage-like on the horizon. But we cannot assume our protestations thus far will be adequate to birth them. We haven't quite cracked the coordinates. Travel there cannot be taken for granted.

I think we've nailed how to say what we don't want, but we find it much harder to articulate what we *do* want—let alone how to achieve it. The protests and the organizing in the wake of the killing of George Floyd have shown us in no uncertain terms that a great thirst for change exists. But it's not so much that there is too much to do, it's more that we require a new, far more expansive, approach to understanding what we want to achieve and the steps necessary to take us there. As the scholar George Lipsitz cautions, "Good intentions and spontaneity are not adequate in the face of relentlessly oppressive and powerful well-financed military and economic political systems."³

Understanding Coalition

The outpourings of solidarity and offerings of support that accompanied the Black Lives Matter protests made many of my peers angry, understandably. There were accusations that, like so much else related to black lives, this was a trend, that the black “solidarity” squares that flooded Instagram were empty, meaningless, performative gestures. I would agree, but I would go even further and ask, Isn’t that the substance (or lack thereof) of online activism more generally? As a representational tool, isn’t it by its very nature performative? We seem to have replaced *doing anything* with *saying something*, in a space where the word “conversation” has achieved an obscenely inflated importance as a substitute for action.

It’s hardly surprising, given that we are obsessed with “representation.” Incarcerated in a socially constructed domain of signifiers, isn’t the ideal activism produced in such a mirror world hollow, gestural, and performative? I wasn’t made particularly angry by the events of 2020, because in terms of racism it was just business as usual. I had already been angry, had spent most of my life angry, at racial injustice, at inequality, at the intentional impoverishment of Africa and the

global south, but more latterly angry also at the inconsistencies, contradictions, and hypocrisies that seem to characterize so much online “activism” and, perhaps, the current model of activism itself more generally. Collective goals seem to have been replaced by “visibility.” Long gone, it seems, are the organized strikes of the black liberation movements of the 1960s. As Lipsitz notes, there is little evidence of the “parallel institutions” that were built then: the Freedom Schools, the community banks, the community land trusts, the breakfast clubs. Where’s the program, the consistent set of demands characterizing and unifying this current moment? Lipsitz continues, “People will be seduced and bribed by thinking that if they’re visible, their politics are viable, that as long as they live in an economy of prestige, the image of them acts as a simulacrum of reality.” But, he warns, “ethnic studies can do very well, while ethnic people are doing very badly.”⁴

There is a lot of directionless anger. The feminist poet and scholar Audre Lorde confides that “sometimes it seems like anger alone keeps me alive; it burns with a bright and undiminished flame”—and oh, the spark of recognition that ignites somewhere inside me at those words, but it’s a memory of an emotion rather than the feeling of it. For anger, Lorde continues, “like guilt, is an incomplete form of human knowledge. More useful than hatred, but still limited.” Anger may be a necessary stage, but take heed, beloveds: both

guilt and anger collude to obstruct coalition building and the identification of affinities and points of shared interest that exist beyond categories that were invented to divide us, invented in order to more effectively oppress us.

There are multiple reasons why I wasn't specifically angry at "white" people's responses to the events of that summer, but one of them is that I have no expectations of "white people." In truth, what the year of the pandemic, more so than any other, has taught me is that I have no expectations of any "racial" group. How could millions of heterogeneous people live up to any one singular expectation of mine?

In the UK we theorize about what "white people" should do in the context of antiracism, when in truth we are often generalizing about our expectations of (upper-)middle-class English white people, and making it universal. (The English elite *do* have a quaint tendency to refer to themselves as "middle class," incidentally, which is self-deprecating, in line with cultural class norms, but more perniciously is also rather useful in making their accomplishments appear more earned, than, you know, the result of their granddaddy being the Earl of Aylesbury, not to mention normalizing what is often obscene privilege.) And let's not forget that lots of white people have different responses to each other, in the same way that black folks also differ in their thinking (shocking, I know!). I think it's imperative to say here that I'm not letting

“white” people “off the hook” or failing to “hold them to account”; it’s just that while I hear these phrases I don’t really know what they mean, or even really what they look like. Who adjudicates the accountability in this instance? The court of Twitter?

Amid all the repetitions in the glut of online advice that has proliferated, there are glaring omissions and, even more worryingly, a reaffirmation of the commitment to racialized thinking. Yes, racism is bad, it asserts, yet the conversation is framed as though there are available outcomes *other* than racism when one assumes “race” as a foundational truth.

This unconscious tendency to double down on the racial categories “black” and “white,” making blanket statements about the behaviors, beliefs, actions, and desires of diverse groups of people unified under fictive, generic “races,” highlights how many of us still apparently believe that race exists as a natural biological reality. I have serious reservations about popular social movements, however well intentioned, that reinforce a reinvestment in racial categories in this way. “Allyship” being described as a “selfless act” exacerbates the division, assuming a fundamental and immutable separateness between “different” “races,” offering charity at the expense of solidarity.

Coalition building, on the other hand, is about identifying shared interests. Through observing movements of the past, we can see that groups far more radical than most of ours today often worked *together*

(but in some cases separately) in pursuit of common goals, in contexts that were much more polarized than at the present. In the months before he was killed by the police, Fred Hampton, the charismatic young leader of the Chicago chapter of the Black Panthers, created a Rainbow Coalition, between the Black Panthers, the Puerto Rican Young Lords, and the working-class southern whites of the Young Patriots. The coalition organized around the idea that it was in the best interests of black and other oppressed and minoritized people, together with disenfranchised whites, to organize collectively against racism, police brutality, and the inequalities perpetuated by capitalism.

Remember that this is the historical period in which US segregation was dismantled, so it was particularly dangerous and fraught, yet in contrast to today's culture of cancellation, or at least online pile-ons, triggered by the charge of being "problematic" or "toxic," the Black Panther Party (BPP) had a different approach. Regarding the Young Patriots' use of the Confederate flag, that deeply despicable symbol of the slave-owning South, Hampton had this to say: "If we can use that to organize, if we can use it to turn people, then we need to do it." Without being told to, or being "held accountable," the Patriots renounced the flag themselves out of respect for the Panthers.

There are other rich examples connected to the Panthers. When Huey P. Newton, cofounder of the BPP, was asked what white people could do to

support them, he replied that they could form a White Panther Party. The White Panthers, a nonracist group, was set up in 1968, two years after the BPP, by Pun Plamondon, Leni Sinclair, and John Sinclair.

The White Panthers' Ten Point Program was *assertive* in its demands for a better life for all. This is an example of "white" people making demands that would benefit both black and white:

1. We want freedom. We want the power for all people to determine their own destinies.
2. We want justice.

Of course, it is vital to remember while coalition building that we cannot subsume everything under one single struggle, but that is exactly why we need coalitions of *shared* interests. Contrast the demands of the White Panthers above with the almost groveling tone of a lot of allyship today. Unless one is a masochist (which of course some will be), is it not also far more persuasive to be presented with a clear vision of the type of society we want to create because *we all* stand to benefit from it, rather than being chastised to transfer your "privilege" to a "black" person, especially when the steps about how to actually do that are at best vague and nebulous—call out racism, take a pay cut, only support "diverse" brands, all interpersonal, all contained neatly within a neoliberal framework, and all cutely infographical for your socials?

By 1972, Huey Newton himself had shifted the

focus of his political activities from Black Nationalism to “intercommunalism,” seeking to unite and empower all disenfranchised groups. The original BP Ten Point Program was adapted to reflect this changing focus—for instance adding a demand for completely free healthcare for all black and oppressed people—although this led to tensions within the party.⁵ The BPP became more inclusive in its radical vision. With a new focus on injustices, members began to see more parallels between the struggles of *all* exploited and oppressed people, across lines of race and nation.

In racially diverse contexts, such coalitions are often more destabilizing to the status quo than strictly segregated groups. In South Africa, many activists from the late 1970s and early 1980s have spoken of the fact that the apartheid regime was much more reactionary against, and punitive toward, racially mixed organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC), while maintaining more tolerance toward groups who encouraged separatist lines.⁶

The theorist, poet, and philosopher Fred Moten describes coalition as emerging “out of your recognition that it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us.”⁷ Barbara Fields, a professor of history at Columbia University (and the first African American woman to get tenure at that institution), provides, along with coauthor Adam Rothman, a poignant example, writing about the death of a young woman named Hannah Fizer.

Hannah Fizer was driving to work at a convenience store in Sedalia, Missouri, late on a Saturday night in June [2020] when a police officer pulled her over for running a red light. According to police reports, Fizer was “non-compliant” and threatened to shoot the officer, so the officer shot and killed her.⁸

Hannah, whose coworker describes her as “a beautiful person,” had no gun. At this stage it’s a depressingly recognizable tale. Here’s the part that might come as more of a surprise: Hannah was white.

Fields references a database of police shootings in the United States compiled since 2015, writing that

half of those shot dead by police—and four of every ten who were unarmed—have been white. People in poor neighborhoods are a lot more likely to be killed by police than people in rich neighborhoods. Living for the most part in poor or working-class neighborhoods as well as subject to a racist double-standard, black people suffer disproportionately from police violence. But white skin does not provide immunity.

Fields goes on to insist that

those seeking genuine democracy must fight like hell to convince white Americans that what is good for black people is also good for them. Reining in

murderous police, investing in schools rather than prisons, providing universal healthcare (including drug treatment and rehabilitation for addicts in the rural heartlands), raising taxes on the rich, and ending foolish wars are policies that would benefit a solid majority of the American people. Such an agenda could be the basis for a successful political coalition rooted in the real conditions of American life, which were disastrous before the pandemic and are now catastrophic.*

Today's allyship fails to build the necessary coalitions identified by Moten and Fields; it lacks the vision of Hampton. With its reliance on information rather than knowledge, its fetishizing of privilege without any clear means of transferal, as well as the ways in which it actively *reinforces* whiteness, allyship is not only not up to the task, it is in many ways counterproductive. If you, potential ally, are relying solely on that type of material and whatever allyship information you can

* This is of course not to say there is no need for more targeted policies as well. While certain initiatives will benefit society more generally, the Runnymede Trust, a UK race-equality think tank, argues that, while policy makers might claim that universal policies equally benefit everyone who is subject to that policy, it's not always the case. There are some universal solutions that seek studiously to avoid race and as such end up ignoring and not tackling inequalities.

cobble together from Google—because, never forget the foundational allyship principles: “Do not expect to be taught or shown,” and “Google is your friend”—well, then I have little hope about the outcome of all this, no matter how noble your intentions (moreover, we all know about noble intentions and the building materials that constitute the road to hell).

The internet has often facilitated dissemination of information rather than knowledge; as such, even in cases that aren’t quite “fake news,” online commentary skews to the reductive. It tells you what to think, rather than teaching you how to think! Professor Angela Davis warns us that

it is so important not to confuse information with knowledge. In this day and age, we all walk around with these cell phones that give us access to a vast amount of information. But that does not mean as a result that we are educated. Education relies precisely on learning the capacity to formulate questions—what we call critical thinking. Learning how to raise questions not only about the most complicated issues, but about the seemingly simplest issues, is so important.⁹

Armed with snippets of (mis)information—untethered from the radical and reflexive environments they were generated from—social media discourse and the “literature” it generates are often

distorted, shrill, and declamatory, quite unlike the expansive thinking of the black intellectuals and grass-roots activists whose names we evoke but whose deeper lessons we tend to disregard. Today, those who peddle divisive rhetoric and shallow politics are frequently named the spokespeople of our times. In the words of black liberation scholar Cornel West:

If you do it in a way that is easily co-opted (*or a way that can be easily manipulated to suit the divide and conquer tactics of the ruling classes*), you will be celebrated while you pose and posture as something you're not [my italics].¹⁰

I often think about the black feminist scholar bell hooks's proposition:

For me forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?¹¹

On the surface, allyship sounds straightforwardly benign and desirable, but, if we actually consider it, I'm not convinced it is either of those things. The message obscures the rigorous, radical, and expansive vision of movements like the Black Radical Tradition, promoting instead a facsimile that does not stand up

to scrutiny and that advocates more for inclusion into a system predicated on inequality rather than the creation of new systems or parallel institutions. Yet even on those terms allyship fails, as the steps through which “inclusion” and transfer of privilege would occur remain amorphous and vague.

An ally is someone from a non-marginalized group who uses their privilege to advocate for a marginalized group. . . . *They transfer the benefits of their privilege to those who lack it.*[my italics]¹²

First of all, this is wildly generic. Who is the “non-marginalized group” and who is the “marginalized”? What criteria are we using to determine these positions? Once this is established—which it rarely is, beyond simple applications of terms like “black” and “white”—other problems emerge. The sentiment is framed as white loss, or at least sacrifice. Many white people are not in possession of enough privilege to transfer its benefits to anyone—and even for those that are, *why* would they—beyond being “nice,” or as an act of charity and white saviorism (with its links to white supremacy)—feel like sacrificing anything, particularly in the midst of a global recession? Moreover, *how* would they transfer it?

Are the benefits of the “privilege” we are demanding they transfer merely material benefits extracted

through the exploitation of the poor? Of migrants? Of sweatshop laborers? Of the environment? Because the mainstream antiracist conversation is conveniently devoid of any analysis of class or capitalism, this crucial question is left unanswered, and the “transfer of privilege” to “marginalized groups,” irrespective of individual circumstances (these transfers always seem to be framed in terms of individuals rather than systems), starts to look like the transfer of resources to people in the global north—who, although members of “marginalized groups,” still often have structural privilege over other people with whom they might share racial, but not class, identities. In other words, there’s a significant gap in access between an Ivy League graduate who works in private equity and an Amazon delivery person, even when they are both racialized as “black,” and both will have structural “privilege” compared to workers from the global south, with patterns of consumption that actively put more pressure on those communities.

In the US context, Angela Davis talks about the emergence of a black middle class and the fact that Obama’s presidency is emblematic of the rise of black individuals, not only within politics but also within economic hierarchies. She warns that their existence “is not going to necessarily transform the condition of the majority of Black people.”¹³ In South Africa there has been

the rise of a very powerful and very affluent black sector of the population, a black bourgeoisie if you will. . . . It was assumed that once black people achieved political and economic power, there would be economic freedom for everyone, and we see that that's not necessarily the case.¹⁴

Let's also consider whiteness's *internal* meanings. W. E. B. Du Bois took pains to point out *a century ago* that whiteness does not just entail "skin privilege" but is also replete with various psychological attachments.¹⁵ Writing in 1995, Kathleen Cleaver identifies the "widespread failure to acknowledge that whiteness conveys internal meanings [for white people's sense of self] at the same time [that] it fulfills anti-black functions"¹⁶ as one of the primary reasons our efforts to eliminate racism continue to fail.

We might abhor it, but if a tenuous and fragile feeling of superiority over black people or other minoritized people is all Donny has, why is he going to give that up? What is being offered in return?

Whiteness leaves its adherents in a state of vulnerability; if somebody else's inferiority is a necessary prerequisite for your own sense of self, you are somewhat trapped, if not doomed. You are also likely to violently protect the boundaries of your racial group. If whiteness is being defined as "not being the other" and the subordination of that other, then a reversal of status is deeply threatening to the

person's identity. In contrast to much of today's antiracism discourse, David Roediger argues that making "*whiteness*, rather than simply *white racism*, the focus of study has had the effect of throwing into sharp relief the impact that the dominant racial identity in the US has had not only on the treatment of racial 'others' but also on the way that whites think of themselves, of power, of pleasure, and of gender." [my italics]¹⁷

The lack of any coherent or compelling argument as to why "white" people might want to come on board stems, partially, from a lack of theory in these conversations but also from an atomized approach to issues. For those who do want to become "allies," there is the repeated admonishment that they can "never understand." Fair enough, I'll probably never fully understand what it feels like to be a Native American who lives on a reservation, and none of us will ever truly understand what it felt like to be an actual antebellum slave (although their descendants may well have inherited the epigenetic trauma)—but does that need to be stated again and again? Here once more it can feel like one of those online activist slogans that is more concerned with posturing, silencing, and retribution than meaningful outcomes.

What we do require here is an understanding, not so much of an intersectionality of identities, but an intersectionality of *issues*. Linking our struggles together is the work of coalition building, a vision

wherein many people can see their interests identified and come together for a common good. We can start to tell new stories, rather than fall back along fault lines that were designed to divide us in order to better exploit us. While radical Black British activists of the 1970s organized along Marxist and anti-imperialist lines, and as such could identify points of solidarity with other groups such as Bangladeshis and the Irish, many of today's online commentators/"activists"/influencers (the definitions are as amorphous as the aims) rely more heavily on racial-identity politics,* and points of solidarity with other identities are often dismissed. In terms of building mass movements, this might be viewed as a tactical error, but perhaps mass movements are not the aim; nonetheless, it's a missed opportunity. The writer Shafi Musaddique describes one overlooked, but potentially ripe, ground for cultivation:

If our experiences drive our understanding of identity, then one unexplored notion is that Bangladeshis at times feel perhaps ironically close to a white working-class person in the north. Compare the upbringing: low-income manual labour, the invisibility in political and cultural life. Suddenly, we're not so

* Identity politics is often dismissed by the right wing and racists. My critique of it comes from an entirely different place and is expanded upon on pp. 139–43.

different. My most joyous interactions often arise with white, working-class northerners.¹⁸

Where these affinities exist, they are rarely discussed and are unpopular with forces that thrive on division. Race is one of the most powerful, seductive, and enduring myths of the last four centuries; as a "meme" its success is unrivaled. Whiteness and, indeed, blackness are stories, created, like most stories, to give instruction, to teach a lesson. The concept of a "white race" and a "black race" is not something that exists in nature; on the contrary, it is a socially engineered concept *invented* with a very specific intention in mind. That intention was racism. Until we understand this beginning, there will be no happy ending. Until we face the origins of race, racism will endure. Until we come up with a convincing counternarrative we are unlikely to achieve the antiracist world we claim to desire.

1. Vron Ware and Les Back, *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 149.
2. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1971), p. 32.
3. Cornel West and Tricia Rose, "George Lipsitz: The Em-nem of Black Studies," in *The Tight Rope*, podcast (2020).
4. Ibid.
5. Joshua Anderson, "A Tension in the Political Thought of Huey P. Newton," *Journal of African American Studies*, 16 (2) (2012), pp. 249–66.
6. Ware and Back, *Out of Whiteness*, p. 140.
7. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2013), p. 10.
8. Adam Rothman and Barbara Fields, "The Death of Hannah Fizer," *Dissent* (autumn 2020), https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-death-of-hannah-fizer.
9. "Angela Davis in Conversation with Yara Shahidi: 'We're Doing Today What Should Have Started 150 Years Ago,'" *Time* magazine (August 2020), <https://time.com/5880933/angela-davis-yara-shahidi-blm-activism/>.

10. West and Rose, "George Lipsitz."
11. bell hooks, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/249.html>.
12. Holiday Phillips, "Performative Allyship Is Deadly," <https://www.holidayphillips.com/blog/performative-allyship-is-deadly>.
13. Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), p. 39.
14. Ibid., p. 40.
15. See Ware and Back, *Out of Whiteness*, p. 149.
16. Kathleen Neal Cleaver, "The Antidemocratic Power of Whiteness: A Review of David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 70 (3) (1995), pp. 1375–87.
17. See Ware and Back, *Out of Whiteness*, p. 19.
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