

Why People of Color burn out in anti-racist organizing

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From having to coddle and educate White people to being branded 'reverse racists', many People of Color (POC) involved in anti-racism organization burn out. **Toi S.** wonders if it's possible to keep a sound mind and longevity in a career committed to anti-racism and anti-oppression.

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Co-signing for White folks

What this means is that you as a POC organizer are giving the go ahead for other POC organizers or organizations to work with white "anti-racist" organizers.

Sometimes this is fine. Other times this may come back to haunt you because the "work" that the white anti-racist organizers/organization have said they have done around privilege and anti-oppression is not complete thereby leading to additional oppression.

Many POC are wary of working with white anti-racists because, to put this bluntly, there is a sense of mastery that just doesn't exist. There's a lot of empty rhetoric, good intentions, and horrible actions under the guise of being educated as an anti-racist.

Whose anti-racism is it anyway?

And just what does it mean to be anti-racist anyway? Does it mean you are against racism from other folks but don't check your own racism?

Does it mean you are an ally who checks your own privilege and supports POC?

What does support mean to you? Does it simply mean saying your best friend or colleague is black/brown and you don't say racist things outside the comfort of your own home?

Does it mean you are actually trying to create more space for POC and build with POC? Does it mean you are trying to tackle the institution of racism in a substantial way – other than attending one or two anti-racist trainings and thinking you know it all?

From what I've witnessed, groups and organizations that claim to be committed to anti-racist organizing are predominantly white and miss the mark completely.

They commit grave errors in taking up too much space, saying that racism doesn't exist within their space, or denying anything can be done about POC members feeling unsafe in the space.

I've seen POC blamed for being uncomfortable. I've seen POC called reverse racists when they try to point to racism that exists in these "anti-racist" spaces. I have seen white privilege rear its head time and time again in POC being silenced during committees and councils, not getting to form their own committees to promote POC involvement, POC not being taken seriously, POC issues not being confronted, and POC being blamed for the lack of POC presence.

When POC try to speak out about all this suddenly they are a voice of dissonance. They are said to be divisive. When they leave the group/committee/council it is because they "weren't cut out for the committee" or because they were "reverse racists", were "too angry" or "couldn't handle it".

Every explanation points to how deficient they were or how they were too hostile for the organization or committee. This is racist. It goes back to historical views on POC's "place" in this society.

It's not our "place" to speak up and when we do it's just because we're angry and there can't possibly be any credibility to what we say. What we say is always to be questioned and disregarded.

Tokenism and being the "educator"

On top of feeling silenced or unheard in these organizations or groups, POC are tokenized or expected to educate on all that I've mentioned and it is seen negatively when they don't want to do the work for the white folks.

No one in the group notices how much of a burden this is on POC...or how racist these expectations are. Yes, expecting brown people to tell you how to be better and then getting angry when they won't is racist and tied to a history of white folks building empires off the backs of brown folks.

Think about it. Let it marinate.

It's racist to think that a POC should be there to hold your hand through the processing of all this and expect them not to say a word as you lash out, say it doesn't exist, blame POC, and expect sympathy as if it is owed to you.

I have seen this time and time again in anti-racist workshops. POC will flock to the white participants and try to comfort and console them as they realize the harm caused by white privilege. Yeah, I know that there's a such thing as compassion...my problem is with the expectation of some white folks to be coddled and walked through it...supported.

This leads me to talking about the lack of trust and disrespect POC have to deal with among their own community for being committed to anti-racism and co-signing for people who have not done the work on themselves and for the harm they continue to do to POC.

It's really unfortunate but I get it. And when POC organizations are wary and apprehensive to work with you ...you should get it to. It's not because THEY'RE racist...it's because YOU ARE.

Please don't....

Please don't reach out to POC organizations to do the work of unpacking your privilege and understanding racism.

Please don't ask POC to be part of your committees, organizations, and coalitions until you've done this work. (I would say until you've "made a commitment to do this work" but...isn't that the point of having the "anti-racist" label that so many tout?) Making a commitment isn't enough. It just isn't. The work is hard...the work is continuous and never, ever done. It hurts to hear that though you've done the work, that you're still taking up too much space or asserting your white privilege...but...you should be open to this constructive criticism if you are as committed to anti-racist work as you say you are.

You've got to do the work on your own and get back to us (POC) once you've begun healing yourselves and are ready to actually support our communities.

No more lip service, please. No more tokenism. No more blaming us for your superiority complexes, and such.

White supremacy is endemic to this society and thankfully it is crumbling. Will you continue to feed into it while cloaked behind the "anti-racist" banner? It is important that both white and POC anti-racist organizers turn a critical eye toward themselves, address internalized racism, superiority and inferiority complexes, and once healed join to dismantle this institution of racism.

Who I am and who I am not

I'll tell you first who I'm not. I'm not "just another angry POC". I'm not irate but I AM firm in my convictions and it is upsetting to be at square one half a century after the civil rights movement. The truth is that the movement is still happening. We are living and breathing it.

I am a person committed to diversity and inclusion, anti-oppression, cultural competence and civil rights and I'm not going to give up. No matter how arduous.

There are so many civil rights leaders who had to endure so much more. Our foremothers and forefathers have had to endure so much more. I will carry the torch but I will not be taken advantage of. I have my eyes wide open and I'm not afraid to call what I see. No change will come if we don't.

Toi S. is from Austin, Texas. They are best described as a multi-racial, multi-lingual, genderqueer philosophactivist, health advocate, queer and civil rights activist, grassroots organizer and "peacemonger"/peace activist. Toi is also an

anti-oppression facilitator for medical and social service professionals, a womanist, a reluctant academic and a willing educator.

Toi is a screenwriter/playwright/poet/academic writer and is currently working on three projects: an interactive autobiography with poems, prose, and photos called "Saturn Return", a chapbook of their original works, and a book about the many uprisings and revolutions of their ancestors and how these have informed their social justice activism and theories on social change.

Toi's academic work includes papers on the failures of modern medicine to address pain, fibromyalgia and lupus in women of color and the perpetuation of the pain cycle within the community and by the medical profession, a paper on the ethical implications of transgender medicine, and a paper on African and African American women healers of the South, healing as a resistance to the institution of slavery, and the co-optation, failed acknowledgement, and denigration of Native American and African healing methods by modern medicine.

Toi is also writing, co-editing, and has organized statewide community involvement forums in Austin, Texas for the upcoming book *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, a comprehensive resource guide for the transgender/genderqueer/gender non-conforming community that covers health, legal issues, cultural and social questions, history, theory, and more.

You can read more of Toi's writing at [Genderqueer Street Philosophactivist and Advocation](#).