



Combating Racism – Getting in the Game

“But, what can I do?”

As white people, effectively confronting racism requires a journey from a known world down a path with a lot of unknowns and challenges. To be successful and “hold the course” we have to (1) let go of old ways, such as beliefs, behaviors and self-image; (2) discover new ways; and (3) deal with being in-between for a long time (“inbetweenity”).

On such a journey developing awareness and becoming educated is “essential, but not sufficient.” That awareness and understanding must be in service of committed sustained action. Those actions will rely on awareness and understanding - but we must avoid the trap of getting stuck in becoming aware and educated.

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”

William James

You do Not Need to Wait - Act

The way out of that trap is to answer the question, “But what can I do?” The chart below is designed to help each individual or group answer that question in a way that best fits them. It has a wide variety of actions in categories from family and neighborhood to the political system and national issues. Many of those actions can be taken in parallel with increasing awareness and understanding. You do not need to wait to act.

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we have led.”

Nelson Mandela

A Different Challenge for Different People

There is no formula or recipe for white people acting to combat racism. Some people are barely keeping their heads above water in general. Some people have resources and energy that they can redeploy to make a difference. Some people are more comfortable dealing with the unknown than others. Some people have knowledge and skills that better match the challenges than others. Some people have family and friend groups that are more likely to support them than others.

In other words, “getting in the game” is a radically different call to action and challenge for different people. There is no single “right way” to confront racism. Each person needs to find their own path. The key is to act and play a role, even a small role. Small roles matter. Small roles can grow. Staying on the sidelines, however, is supporting racism.

“A lot of people are waiting for Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi to come back – but they are gone. We are it. It is up to us. It is up to you.”

Marian Wright Edelman

Just Start – Act

Choose an action or two where you feel competent and start immediately. Add actions as you are ready. **Note.** “Being ready” does not mean feeling comfortable. It means being ready to take the risks and take the next steps. Our comfort zones will expand, but we need to keep pushing the edges to make the difference we can make.

The action chart below is not a giant profile of what you “should” be doing to be anti-racist. It is a set of possible actions that you can take. It is designed to make it easier for you to choose the actions that fit you, who you want to be, and your current situation. These are examples to make it easier to begin. There are many more potential actions and you will find many as you go.

“If you can’t fly, then run.

*If you can't run, then walk.
If you can't walk, then crawl.
But whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward."*
Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Getting in the Game" How I Can Act

*"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."
Alice Walker*

Act Where?

Your actions may have an impact in a number of areas - from education, police/justice and neighborhoods to the workplace, wealth creation and politics (and more). Because of the number of potential actions, it can be helpful to focus on one or more of these areas of impact. Your actions may also simply be focused on areas where the greatest opportunity for impact exists.

Focus on Your "Worlds."

We are all members of various worlds and our actions can influence any of them – family, friends and acquaintances, neighborhoods, communities (local, national or international), organizations and corporations,, etc. We can collaborate, donate, role model, educate, protest and/or advocate, connect, etc. If you are in position of authority, you may be able to create policy (HR, financial. etc.), set directions, instill values, commit resources, etc.

*"Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all,
thou shalt not be a bystander."*

Holocaust Museum, Washington, D.C.

Act How?

Actions can range from educating and developing self-awareness and self-management to protesting/challenging, advocating, donating, volunteering, collaborating, coaching/mentoring, teaching, setting policy, etc. There are lots of places to act and lots of ways to act to make a difference – large or small.

Connections. You have connections to others – individuals, family, groups, organizations and networks. Those connections may be face-to-face, digital, etc. They may be connections to funding, political influence, individuals or groups of influence within specific organizations or communities. They may be connections to journalists, individuals or groups with information or data, or specific groups in a community, such as police or faith communities. Whether they are powerful or not so powerful, they are still connections and can still be used.

Money. Money matters because it makes things happen. You can't fund everything, so make a plan about where you want your money to go. Do some research to ensure that your money will be likely to result in desired outcomes. You can donate individually or recruit others to donate with you.

You can also patronize black businesses and businesses that are operating in anti-racist ways or making genuine efforts to get there. And you can avoid businesses that are not actively anti-racist or that advertise on racist platforms. That can include how you invest as well as being a customer or client.

Time and Energy – Volunteering. You have professional and personal capabilities. Volunteering where your capabilities match need can be a major contribution. There is an extraordinary range of capabilities that can make a difference - from fundraising and senior administrative or clerical support, to childcare, transportation, and getting out the vote. There is a broad range of need and a broad range of capabilities. Finding the fit is the key and that may take some effort.

Make sure to leave “I’m just a volunteer” at the door. Bring the same commitment and professionalism that you would for a highly paid position. And, if the organization doesn't take volunteers seriously, challenge them or move on.

Time and Energy – Being Present – Being Counted. This is very straight forward. Make your presence matter. Vote (and bring others with you). Advocate for people, policies, communities, desired organizational reforms etc. Protest when advocacy doesn't work or in synch with advocacy. Write, march, campaign, use social media, etc.

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high, and we miss it, but that it is too low, and we reach it.”

Michaelangelo

Individual Action & Systemic Change

There is a common statement that, “Countering racism will require systemic change and individual action is not enough.” That statement is both true and deceptive. It is true that systemic change is required to counter racism. The deceptive part is that individual action is also required because:

1. Systemic change is totally dependent on focused individual action
2. Changes in individual behavior and actions focused on families, neighborhoods, schools and organizations make a difference and create the ground in which systemic change can take root.

In other words, **Your actions, whether focused on systemic change or not, matter – so act where you can.**

<p>Areas of Potential Impact</p> <p>Where differences can be made</p>	<p>Possible Actions</p> <p>Many actions can be done on a small or large scale. Small matters.</p>	<p>Actions I Will Take</p> <p>My commitments to making a difference</p>
<p>Self-awareness, awareness of racism, awareness of “others” & relevant competencies</p> <p><i>“The secret of getting ahead is getting started”. Mark Twain</i></p>	<p><i>Self-awareness, education and developing competencies will be, in most cases, an essential part of making a difference. However, it can happen in parallel with a lot of the possible actions that can be taken.</i></p> <p><i>Some actions will require increased self-awareness, education or development to be effective. Many will not – and those should not be delayed.</i></p>	<p>Self-Awareness & Education/Development Actions</p> <p>1 –</p> <p>2 –</p> <p>3 –</p>

	<p>Topics for Learning</p> <p>There are a surprising number of topics – choose 2-3 and start.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. About being white – the white experience. This is deceptively important and mostly overlooked. 2. About racism – history and impact 3. About the Black experience – from daily experience and safety to wealth creation and the overall impact of racism 4. About change – leading and following 5. About competencies to develop 6. About myself – my own racism (probably internalized from birth to 3 years of age) 7. About my family, my community, my organizations <p style="text-align: center;">Ways to Develop</p> <p>There are also a surprising number of ways to learn and develop:</p> <p>Imagine. As you go through your day imagine what it would be for you to be a black man or woman – doing what you are doing – driving, walking down the street, entering a store or elevator, asking for assistance, walking into a heavily white workplace or school, going to a hospital, entering a courtroom, etc.</p> <p>Watch. There are videos on racism, black movies (not black exploitation films), courses online, etc.</p>	
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	<p>Listen. There are an increasing number of podcasts, recorded lectures, speeches, etc.</p> <p>Read. There is a large selection of readings, from books to articles. Find what speaks to you. There are enough comparisons, reviews and recommendations to make that possible.</p> <p>Discuss. This is best done with others – individuals, groups, face-to-face and online. Discussions can be with other whites, black people or mixed groups – each with its purpose.</p> <p>Visit. There are museums, memorials and historical sites that can be visited to provide a different perspective/experience. They address racism, slavery, genocide, the holocaust, etc.</p> <p>Look at Yourself. Look at your childhood and the ways you might have been socialized – might have internalized racism before you were 4-5 years old. Accept that internalized racism, and then determine how you want to consciously act to counter racism now that you are a teen or adult.</p> <p>Develop Skills. Competence matters when trying to make a difference – from interest-based negotiation, effective listening, and problem solving to organizing and project management. You don't need to master all the competencies, but there will be some competencies where it will be important to have some competence in order to</p>	
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	<p>contribute and feel good about the involvement.</p> <p>Be Vigilant. Watch for instances of your personal racist thoughts or behavior – or tolerating racism – and remedy them (remedy them, but don’t beat yourself up as they will happen in the process of growth).</p> <p>Learn from Experience. As you act and gain experience, there will be a lot that can be learned on a lot of topics. The reality is that, whenever we are on a journey of change – individual, group, organizational or community – we “learn the way.” Preparation is key but learning from the experience can be the make-or-break factor over time.</p> <p>Remember <i>Some actions will require increased self-awareness, education or development to be effective. Many will not – and those should not be delayed.</i></p>	
<p>Impact on My Family</p> <p><i>“I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”</i> <i>Helen Keller</i></p>	<p><i>It’s OK to not be an expert before engaging your family. Learning together is a good way to go.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let your family know what you are doing as an individual to confront racism and what the experience is like 2. Make awareness/education resources and experiences available (age appropriate) 	<p>Actions Focused on My Family</p> <p>1 –</p> <p>2 –</p> <p>3 –</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Don't let racist statements go unchecked at home 4. Educate your kids about racism and how to counter it at an early age if possible, but at any age if they are no longer young – and role model anti-racism 5. Consciously “model the way” 6. Take actions together 	
<p>Impact on My Friends and Acquaintances</p> <p><i>“May your choices reflect your hopes and not your fears.”</i> Nelson Mandela</p>	<p><i>As with families, it's OK to engage friends and acquaintances in countering racism while in the process of becoming more educated and competent. Acting and learning together is almost always a good thing to do.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let them know what you are doing as an individual and what the experience is like 2. Don't let racist statements go unchecked in friend groups 3. Share resources and opportunities for action 4. Ask for support where you need it – and offer support 5. As a member of a group, encourage the group to act in a thoughtful way 	<p>Actions Focused on My Friends & Acquaintances</p> <p>1 –</p> <p>2 –</p> <p>3 –</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Take specific actions together with friends 7. Talk with friends and acquaintances about the experience and “learn the way” together 8. Use your social media platforms to share your thoughts/beliefs, possible ways of acting, stories of successful actions, etc. 	
<p>Impact at School</p> <p><i>“Do your little bit of good where you are. It’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”</i> Desmond Tutu</p>	<p><i>This can vary dramatically from school to school - and depending on your role.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support black teachers 2. Ensure black students don’t get closed out of opportunities – from specific schools to specific programs 3. Find out how slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow, etc. are being taught in your local schools – and offer appropriate resources where possible 4. Contribute to black students’ college funds 5. Support Black colleges and universities 6. Don’t let racist statements go unchecked at school or among parents, faculty or students outside of school 	<p>Actions at Work or School</p> <p>1 –</p> <p>2 –</p> <p>3 –</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Volunteer at school – from mentoring or tutoring to fund raising and assisting in small ways 8. Donate needed supplies 9. Assess whether layoffs or furloughs impact your Black workers disproportionately. 10. Ensure recruiting channels do not penalize black recruits 	
<p>Impact at Work</p> <p><i>“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”</i> <i>Alice Walker</i></p>	<p><i>This can vary widely from workplace to workplace – and depending on your role</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confront situations at work when a person of color is not included in a meeting/distribution, not listened to, or not taken seriously. 2. Acknowledge the contributions of Black colleagues (yes, that actually needs to be said) 3. Use your connections to connect people, influence policies, develop systems and processes, ensure inclusion, etc. 4. Provide support specifically to Black employees during times of crisis or major transition. 	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Ensure that managers know how to support Black colleagues. 6. Foster inclusive spaces for Black employees. 7. Implement clear mechanisms for responding to and resolving discrimination against Black workers. 8. Conduct an assessment of your current workforce demographics. 9. Set recruitment targets to address any discrepancies for Black employees. 10. Conduct an analysis to confirm that you are paying Black employees equally. 	
<p>Impact on My Clubs and Organizations</p> <p><i>“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” Many Authors.</i></p>	<p><i>Clubs and organizations come in many forms, many of which can be surprisingly exclusive, often in small, but high impact, ways</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit Black members (in sufficient numbers to not be isolated) 2. Determine how to make the club or organization welcoming 3. Change any symbols, policies or language that is racist 	

	<p>4. Affiliate/partner with comparable black organizations</p>	
<p>Impact in My Immediate Neighborhood</p> <p><i>“Let your lives speak.” Quaker principle</i></p>	<p><i>There will be some overlap with the “community” section.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don’t participate in and accept zoning that is “snob zoning “ 2. Don’t let racist statements go unchecked 3. Volunteer in your neighborhood - bring your professional expertise to bear in large or small ways 4. Donate to neighborhood organizations or projects 5. Find ways to support families – from transportation to childcare – on your own or through formal or informal groups 6. Welcome new black neighbors – or connect with black families you have not gotten to know 7. Watch for the sneaky thoughts like, “Does that person belong here? Are they a threat?” 8. Patronize black businesses/professionals 	<p>Actions in My Immediate Neighborhood</p> <p>1 -</p> <p>2 -</p> <p>3 -</p>

	<p>9. Patronize businesses that clearly support anti-racist action and model it in their operations</p> <p>10. Don't buy from companies that exploit people or advertise on racist platforms</p> <p>11. Join a "white space" to talk about racism and how to take anti-racist actions with other whites</p>	
<p>Impact on My Community (town/city/state)</p> <p><i>"We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee." Marian Wright Edelman</i></p>	<p><i>There will be overlap with the "neighborhood" section. This is a larger scale.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't participate in and accept zoning that is "snob zoning " 2. Advocate for policies, funding and programs that confront racism or support black communities. And challenge/protest those that don't. 3. Organize a group (formal or informal) to meet a community need. 4. Let elected officials know you exist and what you support or object to. 5. Don't let racist statements go unchecked 6. Use your connections 	<p>Actions in My Community</p> <p>1 –</p> <p>2 –</p> <p>3 –</p>

	<p>7. Support initiatives strengthening predominately black neighborhoods – safety, public transportation, stores and businesses, education, green spaces, schools, etc.</p> <p>8. Donate to families who have had a member killed</p> <p>9. Join or donate to a group fighting for equitable treatment in the justice system – police – courts – jails – post-release</p> <p>10. Bring your professional expertise to bear</p> <p>11. Find ways to support families – from transportation to childcare – on your own or through formal or informal groups</p> <p>12. Join community groups addressing racism or healthy communities</p> <p>13. Patronize black businesses/professionals</p> <p>14. Patronize businesses that clearly support anti-racist action and model it in their operations</p> <p>15. Don't buy from companies that exploit people or advertise on racist platforms</p>	
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	<p>16. Join a “white space” to talk about racism and how to take anti-racist actions with other whites</p>	
<p>Impact on the Political System</p> <p><i>“The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.”</i> Albert Einstein</p>	<p><i>There is a wide array of types of action here.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send letters/emails to local, state, national representatives, attend their town meetings 2. Demand racial impact studies for major legislation, policies, etc. 3. Join groups addressing racism in the political system(s) and follow their recommended actions 4. Work to get qualified black politicians nominated and elected 5. Donate to groups with a focus on the political system, particularly fighting for voting participation and against voter suppression 6. Use your connections 7. Confront voter suppression – call it out, challenge representatives and media, mobilize groups (neighborhoods, faith communities, organizations/companies...) 8. Drive others to register to vote or to vote or help with mail in voting 	<p>Actions on the Political System</p> <p>1 –</p> <p>2 –</p> <p>3 –</p>

	<p>9. Vote – and bring someone with you</p> <p>10. Canvas and campaign</p>	
<p>Impact on Systems/National Level</p> <p><i>“The key to realizing a dream is to focus not on success, but on significance and then even the little victories on your path will take on greater meaning.”</i> Oprah Winfrey</p>	<p><i>This is a complex challenge. Some actions can be individual, some need to be done with others or as part of a group or organization.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Join and/or donate to groups addressing systemic racism on a national scale 2. Challenge any bias in national or professional organizations of which you are a part 3. Challenge bias in journalism and the media 4. Use your network to find resources, connect people and organizations, etc. 5. Bring your professional expertise to bear 	<p>Actions Focused on Systems/National Level</p> <p>1 –</p> <p>2 –</p> <p>3 –</p>
<p><i>“Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world’s ills -- against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence... Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.</i></p> <p><i>It is from the numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man (or a woman) stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes</i></p>		

out against injustice, he (or she) sends a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Robert Francis Kennedy, speech at Day of Affirmation, University of Capetown, South Africa

Example Profiles of People Taking a 1 to 5 or More Actions to Counter Racism

There are literally hundreds (or thousands) of possible profiles of people taking action to counter racism. The chart below shows two examples of a person taking one action, two actions, three actions, or four actions. There are also two examples of people taking 5-6 actions that have a theme. One column has a them of individual actions and one has a them of actions taken when connected with others.

Notes

1. These are “thought starters” – examples only. There is no “right” profile.
2. It is not intended that you find a specific profile to use as a model (although that’s OK if one seems to fit).
3. These profiles are examples of how actions can be put together to make a difference.
4. Some actions are one-time actions and some repeat

The idea is to start acting – even one or two actions. It becomes easier to add actions. The key is to start.

You can use the chart of actions in the PDF “What White People Can Do” to get ideas
<https://counteringracism.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/What-Can-Chart-3-Rev.pdf>

You can use the action template to identify your desired actions – **both immediate and in the future.**

Number of Actions	Profile #1	Profile #2
1 Action	Contribute \$ to an organization countering racism	Complete a 30-day course in awareness and education
2 Actions	<p>Educate my kids about racism and how to counter it at an early age if possible, but at any age if they are no longer young</p> <p>Confront situations at work when a person of color is not included in a meeting/distribution, not listened to, or not taken seriously.</p>	<p>Bring together a small group of people to challenge and support each other in countering racism in our neighborhood</p> <p>Create a system for myself to consistently communicate with political figures to counter racist laws, policies, etc.</p>
3 Actions	As I go through my day imagine what it would be for me to be a black man or woman – doing what I are doing – driving, walking down the street, entering a store or elevator, asking for assistance, walking into a heavily white workplace or school, going to a hospital, entering a courtroom, etc.	<p>Participate in a march or protest event(s)</p> <p>Volunteer at an organization engaged in countering racism</p> <p>Assess how my professional organization includes or excludes people of color and advocate with others for change</p>

	<p>Look for and support initiatives that support local Black communities</p> <p>Mentor a Black student</p>	
4 Actions	<p>Join a group countering racism (after researching a good “fit”)</p> <p>Work to “get out the vote”</p> <p>Consciously role model anti-racism behaviors as an individual</p> <p>Contribute \$ to an organization countering racism</p>	<p>Commit my professional skills to an advocacy initiative</p> <p>Use my social media platform to let people know what I am doing, ask for ideas, and share what others are doing</p> <p>Become part of a discussion and action group in my faith community</p> <p>Educate my kids about racism and how to counter it at an early age if possible, but at any age if they are no longer young</p>
5-6 Themed Actions	<p style="text-align: center;">Focus on Connecting - Collective Action</p> <p>Become part of a discussion and action group in my faith community</p> <p>Use my social media platform to let people know what I am</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Focus on Individual Action</p> <p>As I go through my day imagine what it would be for me to be a black man or woman – doing what I are doing – driving, walking down the street, entering a store or elevator, asking for assistance, walking into a heavily white</p>

	<p>doing, ask for ideas, and share what others are doing</p> <p>Bring together a small group of people to challenge and support each other in countering racism in our neighborhood</p> <p>Use my connections to connect people, influence policies, develop systems and processes, ensure inclusion, etc.</p> <p>Assess how my professional organization includes or excludes people of color and advocate with others for change</p>	<p>workplace or school, going to a hospital, entering a courtroom, etc.</p> <p>Consciously role model anti-racism behaviors as an individual</p> <p>Volunteer at an organization engaged in countering racism</p> <p>Mentor a Black student</p> <p>Contribute \$ to an organization countering racism</p> <p>Commit my professional skills to an advocacy initiative</p> <p>Consciously role model anti-racism behaviors as an individual</p> <p>Participate in a march or protest event(s)</p> <p>Confront situations at work when a person of color is not included in a meeting/distribution, not listened to, or not taken seriously.</p>
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