



What is Really Asked of White People in Countering Racism (Why Committing to Counter Racism is So Deceptively Hard)

To take significant and sustained action to counter racism asks a surprising amount of White people. It is a deceptively powerful challenge, and it needs to be clearly seen in order to diminish its power to stop us. This a journey – not just an event or project.

As White people we need to take on this challenge with our eyes open because then we can draw on the character and capabilities that we have developed over a lifetime to meet the challenge– and grow in the process.

The 10 Natural Demands

Each individual White person can probably come up with more demands or requirements, but these are common and very natural things that are asked of us. It's a surprisingly powerful list. Different demands will affect different people in different ways, but this set of demands will be in play naturally.

1. **We must confront an evil that has been built into American life for 500 years.**
As the dominant group in America, that is a natural and unavoidable indictment of us. We have to move past that indictment to commit to countering racism. That means not being diminished by it, not retreating to denial, and not making excuses. We aren't responsible for our history, but we are responsible for how we act now.

This is also a very big, complex, and tough challenge, so it is daunting to face. That means that we face it from our larger self vs. smaller self and we realize that we don't need to face it alone. Nor is it going to be a "quick fix."

2. **We are asked to leave our comfort zone** – and stay out of it when we get challenged, disappointed, or frustrated on the path. This is a bigger deal than it sounds, partly because there are other factors challenging us or driving us to leave our comfort zones. However, our comfort zone will expand with experience and we grow outside our comfort zones.



3. **It requires making a significant extra effort** just by definition. Most people are already stretched thin dealing with the challenges of everyday life. We are, therefore, asked to either invest more time and energy or substitute countering racism for another priority.
4. **We must take risks** to make a difference and we can't know at the beginning what those risks might be – but it feels risky. We vary in our tolerance for risk, but for almost all of us there will be some degree of risk in engaging in countering racism.
5. **It requires going forth into a great deal of unknown** with an unclear destination. This is true with any major change and countering racism is no exception. Countering racism is just a path with a great deal of unknown and we have to have the courage to go forth and “learn the way.”



6. **We must be we willing to let go of a number of possible things**, for example our understanding of the world, self-image, the nature of some relationships, some beliefs, some sense of belonging or place, some behaviors, etc. We may be surprised at how little we have to let go of, but we can't know that at the beginning.
7. **Countering racism will require that we discover and master new ways of thinking and acting.** This takes a surprising amount of time, energy, discipline, and perseverance.
8. **For a long time we will be dealing with “Inbetweenity”** – the feeling of being between old ways and new ways – no longer quite “here” and not quite “there.” This

can be unsettling and can easily cause a retreat back to the old comfort zones and known worlds. Having let go of old ways and not yet having found the new ways – a new known world where we have a place - is like letting go of a trapeze and not yet connected to the other one.



9. **The ability to persevere in the face of barriers, frustrations, disappointments, rejections, mistakes, and setbacks is required.** This is required in any area of significant growth, but it is particularly important in countering racism because it's a long complex path and there is no way around “downs” that are in service of the successes. They are just part of the path.
10. **There is an “opportunity cost.”** Other opportunities may be lost if we focus on countering racism. Countering racism requires the willingness to reprioritize in order to being invested enough. Saying “yes” to countering racism will naturally require saying “no” to other possibilities



These are Not Reasons to Avoid Committing to the Challenge

These are just realistic dynamics that we must deal with in order to genuinely commit to intentional action to counter racism. They combine to form a challenge that naturally calls for our best – our courage – our ability to go beyond our immediate self-interest – the competencies and qualities that we have developed in our lives – our ability to persevere and be resilient – our belief that our actions have significance.

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

If we say “yes” to the challenge, we will be tested – and we will grow in the process of being tested. Our comfort zone will also grow. If we fail to say “yes” – either saying “no” or simply saying nothing at all, we lose the opportunity to make a difference as well as the opportunity to grow in significant ways.

“Challenges are what make life interesting. Overcoming them is what makes them meaningful.”

Anonymous