



An Open Letter to My White Colleagues

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I love you. I love your passion, your commitment, and your service. I want you as part of the movement for equity and justice. But this is not about what I want; it is about what I, as a 40-year-old Black President/CEO and colleague, need from you. I NEED your leadership. I need you to no longer view yourselves as allies in the fight for justice, but to be leaders in this struggle.

White supremacy is the foundation of injustice in our society and has bred racism and oppression for those of us upon which whiteness has not been bestowed. For over 400 years, Black people in America and throughout much of the western world have had to fight for our freedom, our humanity, our dignity, and our right to exist. But we, alone, cannot actualize these desires in societies where white supremacy permeates the systems and institutions upon which we rely. Dismantling white supremacy requires a cultural shift co-catalyzed and co-led by white partners in the struggle.

Make no mistake, white supremacy is a foundational characteristic of this society from which all white people have benefited. It has been edified, codified, reinforced, and reincarnated over the course of five centuries at the expense and exploitation of primarily Black people. Most of the monumental success we have had, historically, has been achieved when we have had a critical mass of white partners in position of power and influence join the fight and use their sociopolitical capital to create systemic change.

The fight for equity, justice, and the eradication of white supremacy is your fight! Black, Brown, and indigenous people can provide the weapons, but until you are on the front lines, leading the charge in your communities and nationwide, we may only intermittently win battles but never the war. Rest assured, though, we will be with you all the way. But, the time of allyship is over. We need you to join us as leaders on the front lines.

My white United Way colleagues, I am lifting you up because you occupy a uniquely privileged and powerful position in our network. There are about 1100 local United Way organizations in our US network. Approximately 78% of our US network is white. But you occupy over 90% of C-Suite positions, including 93% of CEOs, 91% of COOs, and 92% of CFOs. You also account for 90% and 85% of resource development and community impact lead staff, respectively. You are literally the face of United Way in an overwhelming number of communities, giving you access to leaders, influencers, and decision makers across the country. I NEED you in this fight.

Do not leave it up to your Black (and Brown and indigenous) colleagues to lead this fight for racial equity and justice by ourselves. Your whiteness has enabled you to have pathways to prosperity and seats at tables at which the vast majority of your Black colleagues will never sit. But, to whom much is given, much is required. Your privilege

requires you to lead in the struggle for freedom and justice for all, not just for some. You must hear and listen to our pain and use your power and privilege to amplify our voices to create change in all of our communities.

We are hurt. We are frustrated. We are agitated. We are traumatized. We are famished in a seemingly barren land and dying of thirst with no oasis in sight. But most of all, we are, in the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” The 400-year project of systemic, institutional anti-Black racism was not built and will not be dismantled overnight. This we know. But we also know – because history has taught us – that white partnership in this fight can help bring about the change we want to see in this world.

Yours in solidarity,

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