

# HOW WHITE LIBERALS PERPETUATE RELATIONAL VIOLENCE

BY [COURTNEY ARIEL](#)



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Recently, a white acquaintance asked me how I was doing in the midst of black bodies being murdered – in the streets, in homes, in cars, in parks, in prisons, in plain-sight, and in the dead of night. It's worth noting that this is something that has been happening since Africans were kidnapped from their native land and sold into slavery – but now it's on camera.

The acquaintance was writing to check in on me, to say that now they were listening and acknowledging their white privilege. They then went on for several (lengthy) paragraphs about recent difficulties and how hard this time has been for them. I empathize that we are in a global pandemic, and some days feel insurmountable to many people. It's prickly and not at all linear.

But let me say this: Reaching out to members of communities in crisis to ask how you can care for them and then putting them in a position to care for you is not being an ally. This is just one of the many ways that white liberalism can be so dangerous and continues to do incredible harm.

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## READ: For Our White Friends Desiring to Be Allies

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White people need to stop taking all of the oxygen out of spaces with the need to be seen as good or as doing the right thing. White people were born into a racial construct of presumed inherent superiority, and great fragility. White supremacy often teaches marginalized people to hold the bulk of our emotional space for the experiences of white people and apply scarcity to our own experiences. This is more toxic, relationally violent, and depleting than I can say. But it means that in the midst of my community in crisis and rage within myself, when I received this message from a white acquaintance claiming to be an ally, I took the time to respond with care. I feel for how challenging and heartbreaking this time has been and remains. But inherently, and possibly unconsciously, this individual likely knew that I would respond this way; this is how whiteness expects the world to respond to it. This person needed to be seen in their liberalism as fighting through their extreme pain to show up for social justice. They needed to be seen as a martyr.

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We all have work of unlearning and healthy relearning to do. All of it is profound. However, for marginalized people, our unlearning is necessary for our freedom from oppression. White people's unlearning is necessary to stop being an oppressor. Imagine slaves that were asked to console their masters — the wounds on their backs still tender to even the slightest graze of fabric on their skin, shifting to hold in the unspeakable pain, while catching white tears.

I understand that there is a desire for some to be seen and acknowledged in their very real pain — in this collective pain — but asking black people who are fighting for their lives, and perhaps simultaneously creating resources for white people to become anti-racist, to then give their energy and care right now is relationally violent.

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**THERE IS UNREST HERE,  
UNEARTHING UNREST:**

**LONG-SUFFERING,  
SILENCED, BRUTALIZED,  
BURIED, CAPTIVE, CAGED,  
HUNTED AND HUNG, HOLY,  
UPRISING UNREST.**

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TWEET THIS

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It's also not okay to ask black people how they feel about "violent protesters" when images arise of people looting and rioting. Protesters are protesting. Looters are looting. Rioters are rioting. Sometimes there is overlap between those, but I don't want people to miss what's happening right now by looking at the wrong thing. I speak for myself alone when I say that it is egregious for people to be more concerned about the destruction of property and stealing of material items than they have ever been about the destruction of human life since the violent colonization of this land until now. I feel deeply for the lives lost, those injured, the places destroyed. But if property loss is our focus, we need to change our vantage point.

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**READ: Black Rage in an Anti-Black World Is a Spiritual Virtue**

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There is unrest here, unearthing unrest: long-suffering, silenced, brutalized, buried, captive, caged, hunted and hung, holy, uprising unrest.

We cannot move with emotional scarcity. Not now. It is not what we were created for. Don't text or direct message black folks to ask things that you can find out yourself. If you do, do so respectfully, succinctly, acknowledging the emotional energy that it takes, and be understanding if they choose not to engage. That said, here is what allies *can* do.

- **Vote**, keeping in mind the communities of people that do not live with your privilege.
- **Protest\***, using your body/voice in situations where you will be safe, when a marginalized body may not.
- **Call** elected officials and hold them accountable. Sign petitions. Send emails.
- **Donate** to organizations that are on the ground doing the work: Do your homework! An internet search can often (not always) be your friend as this information changes.
- **Follow** Black Lives Matter, black activists, Indigenous activists, and other marginalized people who are doing the work of anti-racism. Also follow black artists telling black stories!
- **LISTEN.**

To my acquaintance, and white people who need to hear it, I say this lovingly and from a place of abundance, without scarcity: I know you are hurting too. You are human. But this is not about your pain.

*\*Keep in mind health guidelines from the CDC and WHO for COVID-19. Protect yourself and others.*



### **Courtney Ariel**

Courtney Ariel is a songwriter and storyteller. Her music appears on most streaming platforms. She is committed to speaking back—speaking truth—to systems of oppression, which she believes to be at the core of her resistance and pathway to liberation. Despite what middle school adolescence taught many of us, she thinks we are the coolest when we admit we don't know, care deeply and continue trying. Let's give it a shot.

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by [Dante Stewart](#)



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