

Ally vs. Accomplice

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For months anti-racism books, like *White Fragility*, *So You Want to Talk about Race*, and *How to Be Antiracist*, were at the top of book lists as thousands committed to educating themselves about race and racism in the United States. Social media was flooded with infographics about history that had been whitewashed, links to petitions and other resources. People were researching unjust laws that allow for legal corruption, like prosecutorial discretion and qualified immunity.

All in all, it seemed as though the non-Black world was collectively realizing that what is happening right now did not happen out of thin air but rather is the predictable outcome of systemic racism.

A term you have probably heard very frequently in the last few months is “ally.” What does it mean to be a good ally?

As a general rule, being a good ally means not centering yourself when it comes to racial issues. It means you stand with marginalized communities and commit to learning about racism and how it infects each facet of society. It means questioning your own implicit biases.

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An ally stands up against racial injustice. But time and time again, self-proclaimed allies do not extend their efforts when it comes to their career or when their own relationships with friends and family are on the line. They will let racial microaggressions or blatant racism slide because “Uncle Sal will never change”. Or it’s their boss so they stay silent as to not ruffle any professional feathers. Allies can attend protests, sign petitions and work to dismantle injustice, but at any time revert back to the systems and status quo that serves only to benefit themselves.

That is why social justice advocates have started making the distinction between allies and accomplices. An accomplice is willing to disrupt their lives to dismantle racism, even if it means personal or professional backlash. An accomplice intentionally spends their money at organizations and companies that align with their views. Whether it be explicit or implicit racism, accomplices recognize that both forms allow oppression to continue.

This is not to bash the journey of ally-ship. But it is just that: a journey. As allies continue to grow and gain confidence in what they believe, they will (hopefully) transition into accomplices. They will hopefully have recognized the privileges that they benefit from and use those privileges to speak out against racism and injustice whenever and wherever.

As Malcom X writes, “I have these very deep feelings that white people who want to join Black organizations are really just taking the escapist way to salve their consciences. By visibly hovering near us, they are “proving” that they are “with us.” But the hard truth is this isn’t helping to solve America’s racist problem. The Negroes aren’t the racists. Where the really sincere white people have got to do their “proving” of themselves is not among the Black *victims*, but out on the battle lines of where America’s racism really is—and that’s in their own home communities; America’s racism is among their own fellow whites. That’s where sincere whites who really mean to accomplish something have got to work.”

While I don’t see accomplice-ship replacing the word ally-ship in the near future, it is important to make the distinction between passive and active activism. The point is not to be able to say that you are an accomplice versus an ally. Rather, the distinction between the two words should be an opportunity to look inward and reflect on what more you can be doing.



ABOUT THE CENTER FOR LEGAL INCLUSIVENESS

Center for Legal Inclusiveness (CLI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (Tax-Id 26-1264252) based in Denver, CO. Our mission is to advance diversity in the legal profession by actively educating and supporting private and public sector legal organizations in their own individual campaigns to create cultures of inclusion.

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