

*What White Allyship Means to Me* by Prof. Megan Lewis

As a white South African, apartheid was not my creation, and nor do I support it as an idea or a practice. But, I have to be able to acknowledge that I benefitted from it – and take responsibility for that. I don't need to beat myself up for it and feel guilt or shame (though both of these emotions are often a starting point in the process of coming to consciousness). I don't need to deny my existence, culture, heritage, language, or roots. But, I do need to understand how my existence, culture, heritage, language, or roots have been supported, praised, and given status in the world at the expense of the existences, cultures, heritages, languages, or roots of people of color. While I cannot change history, go back and rewrite the past, or correct past wrongs, I can decide how to live my life as an ethical citizen of a global world in the present and in the future:

- I can practice radical empathy. I can treat everyone I meet with respect and care, with an openness of heart and without automatic judgment. I can engage people by looking them in the eye, shaking their hands, sitting and breaking bread together.
- I can call out injustice when I see it, stand up (or kneel down) for what is right and fair in the world.
- I can stand alongside my sisters and brothers who need my support, and I can also step aside to let others have their platform to speak. I can consider when to speak up...and when to be quiet and listen.
- I can listen to, and for, the voices of others who are not like me.
- I can celebrate my own culture but also that of people from different cultures than my own.
- I can be an ally to communities of color, queer folk, immigrants to this country, and groups I know struggle to claim space in a world that makes them feel invisible, undervalued, and afraid.
- I can support the arts and follow the work of artists speaking truth to power.
- I can not support institutions that discriminate against people; I can put my money where my mouth is.

- I can be careful and considered in my actions and my speech. I can read books, not just tweets, and make informed arguments rather than confuse opinion or punditry for fact.
- I can catch myself when I feel defensive, or am called out on something problematic I said. I don't always need to be right or to explain away my missteps. I can simply say I am sorry and that I have learned something.
- I can refuse, resist, defy, and dissent against tyranny, fascism, and hate speech at every level of society, from the White House to the schoolhouse to my neighbor's house.
- I can teach my students...and teach my children...about the history of oppressive systems so they know the past and can make informed decisions to live life on different terms.
- And I can chose not to feel threatened when other people express their perspectives, confess their painful struggles, or critique white supremacy. I love the phrase, "Equal rights for everyone does not mean less rights for you. It's not pie."
- I can live my life through the African practice and philosophy of Ubuntu. I exist because you exist; we exist together. Our humanity is mutual, and we depend on one another to make this world.