



Ally? Or a lie I tell myself?

On May 25, George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American man, was killed in Minneapolis.

A tragic act of violence, a racially-aggravated murder, took Mr Floyd's life from him, his family, his community.

George Floyd's killing **was** the latest (it's not now) in a heart-breakingly long list of black people who have lost their lives to racism in the police ranks and in society, both in the US and in the UK.

Watching the ensuing coverage, I began to see that I've been misguidedly, unwittingly unseeing of the scale and insidiousness of systemic oppression inflicted upon black people. I knew parts of the story, of course I did. But that was not commendable. It was ignorant.

I knew that black people could (do) experience discrimination in many different arenas: in education, at work, in our health system (GP surgeries, hospitals, mental health settings). I knew that black fictional characters get killed off first. That we don't see nearly enough black people in mainstream media. That there are far too few black protagonists in books for readers of all ages. I knew bits and pieces. But, I hadn't consciously and deliberately sat down and joined up all these dots. So, I started to join them.

I learned that

- Afro-Caribbean pupils are [three times more likely](#) to be excluded from school than white British pupils.
- Black and Asian households are [twice as likely](#) to be in persistent poverty as white households.
- The effects of austerity mean an average of [5 percent](#) loss of income for black households, which is double the loss for white households.
- The [ethnicity pay gap](#) reaches as high as 20%.
- Police were [28 times](#) more likely to stop and search black rather than white people.
- If you are black, you are [three times more likely](#) to have a stun gun used against you.
- The proportion of black people [in UK prisons](#) is almost seven times their share of the population.
- Black and minority ethnic people are at greater risk from COVID-19 – they are more likely to be exposed to the virus and more likely to have poor outcomes including fatality if infected. The reasons why are complex, but [evidence](#) has shown that social and economic inequalities upstream are a factor.

*(*all UK data*)*

I understood diversity, I understood unconscious bias and micro-aggression, I understood inclusion. But I was only just beginning to understand [how gravely](#) the individual dots added up to a bigger picture of persistent, prevailing, pervasive oppression.

Through my reading I came across the following quote by Martin Luther King, taken from his [Letter from Birmingham City jail](#).

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice..."

In 1963, [Malcolm X spoke out](#) about wolves and foxes, which he used as an allegory for white conservatives and white liberals. As I understand it, he was asserting that the white liberal has a different method – less outward and maybe less conscious, yet they inflict pain on black people all the same.

I'd always believed that as a Jewish person raised in multi-cultural south east London, I was an ally for black people – my friends and beyond. Wrong, right?

As the scales fell, I understood that you can be an active ally by fighting blatant acts of racism, but that's **not nearly enough**. In order to be a true ally, you must be actively fighting the less obvious forms of racism and structural oppression too.

When I read the quote by the American political activist [Angela Davis](#), I understood better. *'In a racist society, it's not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.'*

I needed to show up. I called my friends. I bought from [black-owned](#) bookshops. I read, I listened. I spoke to colleagues. I made notes:

- Racism is prejudice plus power.
- Colour blindness is a misguided standpoint.
- Affirmative action helps. Matter of fact, it's needed to level the playing field and create equal opportunity.
- (Diversity) Quotas can be controversial, but they are based on solid logic.
- The concept 'Culture fit' is flawed. Better is 'Culture add'.

Since then, I've kept a weekly appointment with myself to consider what anti-racist work I must do that week:

- Check your privilege.
- Examine the role you (and your communities) are playing in maintaining systems of oppression and white supremacy.
- What's affirming the dominant culture and needs to change?
- Who is being 'minoritised'?
- Check where/when/how you are being complicit with unequal, exclusive, racist, discriminatory systems.
- Is there equity here?
- Are the structures/systems perpetuating inequity?

- What small changes can I make that could have a big impact?
- What small changes add up?
- What are the big changes that need to happen?
- Be the voice of others when they're not in the room. Better – have them be in the room.
- Name it when you see it.

Some early results are that I stop to consider:

Was I going to call *Person X* because they're more like me than *Person Y*?

Was I going to wait for *Person B* to reach out to me 'because the ball's in their court', though I'd happily reach out to *Person C*?

Is my tone conscious of others, really? Or is it the tone of dominant culture and needs to change?

Access to employment solutions are needed. But, once a person enters work, is that it? Don't we have a role to find solutions to the systems of oppression that exist *inside* work too, which are barriers to inclusion, belonging, progression and fair compensation?

Isn't it time we review our consultants/suppliers to create opportunities for people who've been excluded?

It's something, I've started. If you haven't already, **start**. And I invite you to share your commitments and your learning too. And I ask you to hold me, yourself and others to account as well.

I definitely hesitated over how/whether to write this.
This is not my story to insert myself into.
I'm centring myself, why?
Are my motivations sound and pure?

Where I've landed is that I need to get comfortable being uncomfortable.
Acknowledge my flaws. Show my thinking. Show my journey. Show up.

I regret that it took another tragic, racist murder for me to finally join the dots. That's straight up poor. Now joined, I'm working at being an active ally.

This piece is dedicated to the memory of George Floyd and his legacy. [Gianna Floyd's daddy changed the world](#) (please watch this clip).

