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Fighting White Supremacy and White Privilege to Build a Human Rights Movement

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Abstract

Loretta Ross presented Fighting White Supremacy and White Privilege to Build a Human Rights Movement as her keynote address at the 2015 White Privilege Conference (WPC). She addresses the foundations of the ideology behind White supremacy, the difference between White supremacy and White privilege, and the development of a new human rights movement. She discusses the role of the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as power relations based on religion, class, gender, and race.

Keywords: Reverse discrimination; White supremacy; Power; Black Lives Matter; Ideology; Human rights movement

Loretta J. Ross is one of the creators of the Black feminist theory of “Reproductive Justice,” and a nationally renowned speaker and writer on women’s issues, hate groups, racism and intolerance, human rights, white supremacy, and violence against women. She was the National Coordinator of the Sister Song Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective from 2005-2012; Founder of the National Center for Human Rights Education from 1996-2005; and Program and then Research Director of the Center for Democratic Renewal from 1990-1995. She was one of the first African American women to direct a rape crisis center in the 1970s, and has been interviewed on CNN, BET, ABC, the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and many others.

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I drove from South Hadley, Massachusetts to get here in Louisville, Kentucky. It was a long drive, but worth it. This conference signals a welcome component of the movement I feel I've been waiting for all my life. I'm dedicated to building a human rights movement in the United States. This requires the defeat of White supremacy, and this seems a wonderful place in which to have the conversation about how and why.

During my drive I stopped in Allentown, Pennsylvania, which was surreally appropriate. Twenty years ago, in February 1995, I received a panicked phone call from an Allentown woman named Brenda Freeman. She called the Center Democratic Renewal to frantically ask for help because her two oldest sons had joined the neo-Nazi movement and were threatening the family. She had reached out to the state Human Relations Commission, her church, and the police—to no avail. We were a long-shot last resort down in Georgia, but she was desperate, although there was little we could do. She didn't want to exile the boys from home but she was sincerely afraid they were serious about their threats to the family. Caught between a mother's love and a victim's fear, she didn't want to change the home locks (as I advised), and worried that if she did so, the 16- and 17-year-old boys would end up homeless.

Three days after that phone call, Brenda Freeman, 48, her husband Dennis, 54, and her youngest son, Eric, 11, were dead, murdered by two Nazi-tattooed, and deeply alienated skinhead kids for whom the

system had no answer before they committed this heinous crime. I'm calling her name to bring her into the room to dedicate this speech to her family.

This is the price that White families may pay when they don't understand the venom of unchecked racism, sexism, and homophobia. This is how youthful White rebellion can dangerously lead to the White supremacy movement. The ideology of White supremacy not only threatens African Americans, other people of color, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, and LGBTQ folk. It can tear a White family apart, sometimes murderously. Kids flying the Confederate flag are not just youthfully rebelling against political correctness. The flag may be their gateway drug to the nefarious netherworld of violence, racism, anti-Semitism, and social alienation. So-called lone wolf vigilantes emerge from this underbelly, and while they may be apparently working alone, they are part of a subculture that feeds on hate and dehumanizes everyone who does not agree with them – even their parents and siblings.

My own personal journey has led me from the women's movement to the Civil Rights movement, to the human rights movement. I feel I've been preparing all my life for this challenge, and we are at a most propitious time in history. Because of the leadership of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, we may be uniquely able to engage more people in fighting White supremacy than we've been able to do in generations. We are privileged to be conscious activists at this time in history. This country has not seen such widespread freedom explosion since the Civil Rights movement several generations ago that seeded the anti-war and the women's

movement. Dreamers fighting for immigrants' rights. BLM activists fighting against police brutality. Marriage equality achieved, and ending "don't ask, don't tell." Health care demanded as a human right. And the list goes on because our role in the revolution has just begun. We will commit the twenty-first century to human rights, peace, and justice – not endless wars and economic exploitation. We will help reason and science triumph over fear, irrationality, and ignorance. To do so, we must dismantle the system of White supremacy that holds our progress back.

Ideology of White Supremacy

Understanding the ideology of White supremacy is vital to understanding the practice of White privilege. White supremacy is not limited to gutter epithets, nor is every practitioner of White supremacy White. It is a set of ideas created to generate wealth in the United States and reserve it for the benefit of a certain group of people, originally property-owning White men. It has evolved into a totalizing system – a toxic sea in which we all swim. Some who promote or implement the ideas of White supremacy are people of color, but they are no less responsible for its prevalence. They serve to launder the ideas as if their mere presence makes this ideology less lethal.

To understand White privilege one must understand White supremacy. When we say White privilege, many people hear "privileged Whites" and vociferously deny that they are part of the economic 1% because something sucks in their lives. Without explaining the dialectical relationship between White privilege and White supremacy, we fail to demonstrate how White supremacy is the *ideology* while White privilege is the *practice*. This is similar to how violent pornography is an

ideology – a set of ideas about how women should be treated – and rape is the practice.

Many people mistakenly conflate White supremacy with racism, as if the two terms are interchangeable. Racism is a fundamental feature of White supremacy, but not its totality. As an ideology or body of ideas, White supremacy is a many-headed Hydra. In the mythology of the Greek serpentine water monster, for every head chopped off, the Hydra re-grows multiple heads. White supremacy presents many faces that rely on several major foundational understandings:

1. Blood purity and Whiteness
2. Race/religion/citizenship/class
3. Patriarchy/homophobia/transphobia
4. Prejudice + Power = Racism

Blood purity and Whiteness. The first tenet – blood purity – is based on the creation of the myth of Whiteness in the 1600s during the settler-colonial period. White male elites were determined to generate wealth and, at the same time, keep control of the emerging country in the hands of the people who owned the land, only White male property owners. This was overt class-based identity politics that depended on the division of human beings into "races" of people. This classification system has no biological or ontological basis, since it is entirely resting on the fluid misrepresentation of the importance of skin color, a faulty melanin-based system not fortified by actual science. But just because they made it up, don't mean it doesn't hurt.

Elite White men had little interest in including property-less White men in the ruling class. At the same time, they had to quell the restiveness of White men denied suffrage, or the right to vote, and foster the

perception that there is a pathway to power following their rules. They did so by creating an economic and social system that defined who was enslaveable and who was not. By designating enslaved Africans and Native Americans as not “people,” they could eventually grant voting rights and some class mobility to all White men, even as they excluded white women until the twentieth century.

Black procreation was manipulated to sustain this White supremacist system to expand the exploitation of enslaved Africans. Black women, men, and children replenished the enslaved labor force, displacing White workers at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This economic exploitation based on multigenerational enslavement made the control of biological reproduction of women a central feature of White supremacy, written into law and social contracts. Who could benefit from the privilege of White skin was codified into the DNA of America.

Interracial marriages were prohibited between Blacks, Native Americans, and Asians as a way to maintain this so-called White racial purity. The notorious “one drop” rule eliminated anyone who was not purely “White” from claiming equality. Of course such legal restrictions did not stop interracial mating, but did ensure that the offspring of such unions would not be included in the definition of “people” who had rights that needed to be respected. Policing the blood boundaries became a matter of law, and race mixing became affixed in the White mind as threatening the natural order of the world.

This obsession with blood purity, reproduction, and interracial sex remains a hallmark of the ideology of White supremacy today. It surreptitiously underlies

most restrictions on women’s rights, such as abortion and birth control, although few White opponents admit so. White male Republicans are responsible for 90% of the antiabortion bills in this country as they try to manipulate its racial composition by controlling who should reproduce and under what conditions. White obsession with racial purity contours continuing school segregation, for fear of young people dating across racial boundaries. It punishes racial transgressors, such as White women in relationships with Black men, or even more violently, Black men who presume to date – or even flirt with – White women (remember Emmett Till?). Yet most people discomfited by the concept of interracial relationships, for whatever reasons, do not attribute their misgivings to the blood politics of White supremacy that continue to monitor the margins of racial relationships.

Race/religion/citizenship/class. The intersections of race, religion, citizenship, and class also are affected by the peculiar institution of White supremacy. The same ruling elite assigned itself the right to define who is White, which religions are acceptable, who can be a citizen, and who is allowed class mobility. Some people currently defined as White were not originally included – such as the Irish, who were initially deemed a separate race of people because of the intersection of religion and immigrant status until the middle of the 1800s. Jews fought for full acceptance into the White definition until after World War II, although anti-Semitism still re-emerges today, such as in actor Mel Gibson’s drunken rants. Catholics were viewed with deep suspicion until the 1960s. President Kennedy’s campaign was besieged by those who questioned whether he would be more loyal to the Pope than the country. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution passed after the Civil War offered

citizenship to everyone born in the United States, specifically to include the former slaves. Even that expansion of basic human rights is now challenged by mostly nativist people who believe that children born in the United States of undocumented parents should be denied citizenship. They are apparently unaware that this demand originated in the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan, who were opposed to rights for African Americans. The Klan launched a campaign of racially motivated domestic terrorism after the Civil War to continue to protect White supremacy.

The Christian Bible was used to justify slavery, colonialism, and genocide through selective interpretations of the scripture that validated the economic and social decisions of elite White men. Today, Christian hegemony is getting challenged on many fronts by those who resist the privileging of one type of religious tradition over others. This represents a loss of White privilege to many Christians (including Christians of color), who demand that their religious views overturn the religiously pluralistic foundations of the country, and eliminate the wall of separation between church and state. Although Christian culture dominates many aspects of American life, such as limiting reproductive freedom, injecting religion into public spaces, and castigating gay rights, these are actually the views of a subset of Christians determined to hold on to their power over others. They claim to be under siege, but in fact, they are losing their power and privilege – socially, demographically, and inevitably. Their rage is endless and they threaten destruction around the world to defend their privilege.

Cynical elites protecting the interests of the 1% have encouraged an apparent permanent resurgence of White people determined to ensure the continuation of

White supremacy. Their surrogates never retreat, but regroup, with even more funding and desperate power they feel slipping from their grasps, which makes them even more dangerous. Embracing a faux anti-elite populism, many of the members of this movement deny they have a racist bone in their bodies. I've talked to some card-carrying members of the White supremacist movement. They will sometimes tell you about the Black friend they have or the Asian child they've adopted as proof of their color-blind credentials. They sometimes call themselves White nationalists, claiming that they are simply protecting the racial interests of White people, but they are not against anyone else. They believe it's simply the natural order of things for White people to be artificially at the top of the economic, political, and social pyramid because of the superiority of European Civilization (always capitalized!) that is patently superior to all others. If not, how else could their ancestors have conquered the world and molded it so neatly to benefit White people? They deserve because they conquer and they conquer because they deserve.

But our focus should not only be on the members of the organized White supremacist movement who openly embrace the cause. They are a numerically small fragment of the American public. The problem is downstream at the hands of those who implement their ideology in our everyday lives, while hypocritically claiming to distance themselves from the company of such noxious people. The white supremacist movement originates the ideas. The religious right sanitizes these sentiments as morally justified. Economic elites rationalize them as financially necessary. Social conservatives define them as American tradition. The cops, courts, and customs enforce them on communities of color. As a result of these porous

membranes defining and maintaining White power, we live with the normative ubiquity of Whiteness that is the default hierarchical standard for who is human, a citizen, or an American.

Class is probably the most misunderstood feature of White supremacy, because many critics of capitalism and neo-liberalism believe that the 1% ruling class and their minions can and should be challenged by a united front of the 99%, and that racism and other social ills will eventually be resolved by such a class struggle. I argue, instead, that race is inextricably intertwined with class in the United States, and that no unified class struggle will occur without the defeat of White supremacy. Time and again, the White working class has demonstrated a frustrating inability to inoculate itself against racist dog whistles that blind them to the studied manipulation by the ruling class. They vote and work against their own economic interests to earn what was called by W.E.B. DuBois the “wages of whiteness,” a dubious currency that is deeply devalued because it never protected them from the rapacious appetite of capitalism.²

Moreover, racism is a strong predictor of class in the United States. A Black family making \$100,000 lives in a neighborhood comparable to that of a White family making \$30,000. A Black college graduate with no criminal record is less likely to be hired than a White high school graduate with a record. Even a cursory examination of high unemployment rates, disproportionate incarceration rates, and substandard educational opportunities reveals that racism affects economic opportunities in this country. We cannot correct these outcomes of White supremacy solely with class-directed remedies.

Patriarchy/homophobia/transphobia. Patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia also operate as boundary markers of White supremacy. Misogyny, or the hatred of women, is so pervasive it’s hard to decide where to begin to describe its omnipresence. Debates on abortion, sex, birth control, equal pay, child care, rape, and human trafficking are among the miscellany of issues the women’s movement endlessly fights to dismantle the inequalities of the patriarchy. Reinforcing sexist discrimination also serves the interests of elites.

The binary definitions of womanhood and manhood erect a false gender dualism that ignores the continuum of human experiences that include people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or gender non-conforming. Moreover, with these hardened masculine/feminine straightjackets disguised as unavoidable roles, transgressions against the binary get punished with stigma, violence, neglect, and stereotypes that clearly demarcate those considered belonging to the White supremacist nation.

Of course, even as one may be targeted for one identity category, another may provide a measure of privilege. Thus, a White man will not be racially profiled by the police like a black man. A White transwoman is less likely to be murdered than a transwoman of color. Intersections of vulnerability and privilege affect everyone, but particularly advantage those who make claims to White skin, even if they are not ethnically or racially White.

Prejudice + Power = Racism. A common response when we identify White supremacy and White privilege is the claim that power of White supremacy. The respondents mistake prejudice for racism. All individuals are capable of being

personally prejudiced, an irrational dislike of the “other.” But racism requires the power to implement that prejudice on an institutionalized scale, to materially worsen lives, economic circumstances, social standing, etc., because of prejudices. The power of racism is structural, not personal. Thus we use the formula Prejudice + Power = Racism. It bears repeating, however, that racism is only one aspect of White supremacy. Similar formulas could be written: i.e., Prejudice + Power = Transphobia, like a chemical mono-substitution reaction.

Reverse Discrimination and Defense of White Supremacy

Charges of reverse racism against African Americans are similar to charges of reverse sexism lobbed at women by men. Without an enveloping system and the power to materially disadvantage White people or men, the charge is a thinly veiled and weak attempt to claim a victim status in order to ignore the present power disparities. This intentional myopia has consequences. The first reverse discrimination case was in 1977 when a White medical student, Allan Bakke, claimed he was discriminated against when his college increased its enrollment of students of Color. He won his case at the Supreme Court, and since then all efforts to eliminate the superstructure of White supremacy affecting college admissions, jobs, and scholarships have been attacked by those claiming to be victims of reverse racism. White anger at the dismantling of White privilege is easily stoked, such as the irrational reaction to the first Black president. This rage, based on the perception of the loss of entitlement, transformed the White Citizens’ Councils of the 1960s that fought desegregation into the Tea Party of today.

Violence because of white rage is almost always framed by law enforcement and the mainstream media as acts of mentally disturbed individuals, not those enacting the marching orders of the White supremacist movement. From Timothy McVeigh who blew up the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma in 1995 to George Zimmerman who murdered Trayvon Martin in 2013, those acting out directly from the White supremacist movement (McVeigh) to those practicing White privilege (like partially Hispanic Zimmerman) are not described as part of a totalizing system of violence used to maintain the power of Whiteness. Like the period of the enslavement and Jim Crow segregation, disobedience equals death, when Black people fail to bow to White authority.

Many people erroneously believe that defenders of White supremacy and White privilege are somehow ill-educated or lower class. However, the recent incident in 2015 of White fraternity boys in Oklahoma joking about hanging a “ni**er” from a tree belies that stereotype. While supremacy infects every class and educational background. In fact, White privilege depends on this fact, just as the “founding fathers” of the system were themselves uneducated. Elites are just better able to offer stylishly constructed denials of racism. Perversely, they now claim that to talk about and identify racism is itself a racist act, defining themselves as the victims. They label the Black Lives Matter movement as a terrorist attack against law enforcement, not the legitimately outraged critics of a criminal injustice system that unfairly murders African Americans with impunity.

White supremacy and White privilege are not based on ignorance, but amass power and direct their anger at Black people in particular, but really at all people

of color, queers, feminists, the disabled, transfolk, non-Christians, etc. Look at the backlash against gay marriage or women's rights. It is evident in the resentment of successful Black people, as if Black success equates to White loss. Numerous polls reveal that the majority of White people believe African Americans don't work as hard as they do, and demand handouts from the government at the expense of the real, hard-working Americans, who are invariably perceived as white. Nearly every discussion of public policy, such as social services, criminal justice, housing, education, public infrastructure, and health care is contaminated by the perception that Black and other people of color will unfairly benefit. Anti-government and anti-tax rebellions are instigated to starve the system of resources required to protect the social safety net, if such resources are perceived to benefit non-White people.

The Deep South where I live is a prime example of the consequences of such beliefs. It has the poorest educational systems, the largest health disparities, and the most fragile public infrastructure, while many White people also suffer from the lack of services that could improve their conditions. Yet unfailingly, the majority of White Southerners will vote against their own economic and social interests when politicians convince them that doing so keeps Black people from benefiting from anything the government should provide. It is not only a legacy of forced desegregation and resentment about the Civil Rights movement; it has morphed into a barely contained White rage that is ultimately shortsighted and self-destructive.

Building a Human Rights Movement

On the theme, I want to start my closing by talking about how White

supremacy hurts White people. As I said earlier, when we say "White privilege" many resistant folk hear "privileged Whites," and repeat the canards they incessantly hear about people of color, Muslims, or LGBTQ people who challenged this myth of a White, Christian, heterosexual nation. They falsely blame others for the social and economic problems in this country, and seek scapegoats instead of solutions. They have an irrational fear of the "other" and believe that only those who are most like them deserve rights, respect, and protection. This sabotages their self-interests. They affirm authoritarianism in our society so that violence to defend White supremacy is normalized, often just called "law and order" in an illogical cruelty that exonerates the state for its human rights violations and makes no one safer. They frequently distort the history of the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, and the expulsion of Mexicans. They shamelessly enshrine monuments and flags to such injustices, and name schools and other public buildings after the leaders. They defend this dubious, unnuanced past as if it were inerrant history handed down from the Temple Mount solely for Christian edification.

It is not surprising that few people know the full history of this country. They teach White supremacy in the schools, although it is rarely outed as such. When textbooks claim that African workers voluntarily immigrated to America to seek jobs and opportunities during the enslavement, that's called a whitewash, folks. This repetitive distortion of reality buttresses this system of injustice and reifies the hierarchy of White power and privilege as if it is a law of nature, not of mankind.

But those folks are not the ones in the audience today, so I want to talk about

not the wages, but the costs of Whiteness for people who want to deconstruct White supremacy and build a movement for human rights in this country. We are the ones who have the privileged opportunity to help save the souls of White folks, to build a world in which everyone is valued and included. Our activist knowledge helps us understand about identity politics, representation, political rhetoric, and systems of oppression. Because of the Black Lives Matter movement (and not so coincidentally, the startling election of President Obama), at this particular historical moment we have a large number of White people who may commit themselves to fighting the injustices of White supremacy with a passion worthy of the sacrifices of a Viola Liuzzo or Michael Schwerner, White martyrs of the Civil Rights movement killed by the Klan. The critical question becomes can we build the relationships vital to deepen our (and others') political engagement? Can we learn to turn *to* each other instead of *on* each other, in the words of Dr. Joseph Lowery? Another Civil Rights icon, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his last Sunday sermon before he was assassinated, called on us to build human rights movement in this country. The question for the twenty-first century is: are we finally ready?

So what are some of the challenges facing White people who want to defeat White supremacy? First you have to stop being afraid to talk about White supremacy, racism, and White privilege. There is a palpable fear of being called a racist for saying the wrong thing, or asking a person of color for help. This fear can create deep silences on racism, homophobia, sexism, and other forms of injustice. That is understandable because not every person of color is ready to trust that White people are sincerely ready to be permanent co-conspirators in the war against White

supremacy. Because White people have the option of just melting back into society without ever challenging its racial injustices, there will be a constant, unending test to prove one's commitment to the struggle for human rights. As others have said before, with great privilege comes great responsibility.

A lack of knowledge can make you feel ignorant, and you may silence or censor yourself because of the fear of speaking out when you witness an injustice, or when someone appears to know more about White supremacy than you do. Techniques for fighting against injustice can be learned, and in doing so, many mistakes will be made. This is common when learning any new skill set. But you don't learn to ride by not getting back on the bike when you fall. As Aristophanes said, "Youth ages, immaturity is outgrown, ignorance can be educated, and drunkenness sobered, but stupid lasts forever." Don't let your fear of saying the wrong thing hold you back from doing the right thing. That's what is really stupid.

The lack of knowledge about White supremacy is one of its pernicious legacies that creates multigenerational trauma in our families. This makes it difficult to discuss at the family dinner table and painful for parents who want to protect their children. It is toxic like a cloud of poisonous gas that invisibly leeches out our inner peace, and denies our common humanity. The families of people who embrace the Confederate flag or the Nazi swastika may lack the words, the knowledge, or the commitment to ending White supremacy to know what to do. Brenda Freeman, whom I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, felt powerless to confront her children, but also confessed that she had never thought it was important to talk to them about White supremacy, racism, and injustices when they were young

enough to listen. She made sure they went to school, doctors, and the church, but invaluable life lessons about race, gender, and class are not normalized in our society, and they should be.

Beware of deflections when discussions of White supremacy and White privilege make you uncomfortable. Such conversations may be painful for everyone. But if talking about White supremacy hurts, what about being its victims? If being oppressed is not safe, what law in the universe says that working against oppression will be safe? Deflection most frequently occurs when a person talks about racism, and someone injects, “Yea, but what about X?” This blatant attempt to change the subject reveals discomfort in staying focused on White supremacy, and particularly anti-Black racism, the fundamental cornerstone of its edifice. Similarly, claiming one is “color-blind” and “doesn’t see race” is also an attempted deflection. Don’t use deflections to avoid moving out of your comfort zone.

But you can prove your dedication by actions, not just radical words. Many social justice activists develop a radical consciousness, but they don’t concomitantly develop revolutionary practices that can build a unified human rights movement. Instead, they sometimes weaponized their consciousness, using it to batter those who don’t perfectly agree with them or share their understandings. Or they deploy their knowledge as a power tool against those who don’t have the opportunity to learn the same things, say the rights words, or avoid microaggressions. This is, in fact, disguised White supremacy, using masked power to attach, humiliate, and belittle others in order to boost yourself. Instead, I believe we have to learn to be humble with our knowledge,

and do human rights work based on love, not anger or ego.

This is the difference between calling someone *in* versus calling someone *out*. You can be a loving advocate against injustice, or you can act like a movement cop, exquisitely using your consciousness to wound others by dominating with your mastery of politically correct language, and turning people off from being politically engaged. Instead, you can hold others accountable with compassion instead of contempt.

White supremacy and White privilege mean we do not enjoy the benefits of the rich diversity of leadership and experiences we could have. Yet we can be stronger together if we quilt together our rich tapestries of knowledges, respecting the gifts (and contradictions) each person brings to the work. We are all victimized violators, people who had our human rights violated before we learned how to violate others. Thus, we can offer the movement the power of forgiveness, first with forgiving ourselves for not always getting things right, and forgiving others for the same.

This will be particularly difficult because sometimes we enjoy a self-righteous power by assuming that there is only one way – ours – to fight White supremacy. This self-delusion harms the human rights movement. When marginalized groups or individuals turn against each other when they lack real access to power, this is called “horizontal hostility.” Not only is it a diversion because it distracts from the real abusers of power, it confuses a problematic ally with a provocateur, or a real enemy. Someone using a term that is offensive may hurt, but someone using a gun may kill. Some disruptors intentionally seek to weaken our

unity. We can't build a human rights movement without learning to distinguish between threat levels.

When dedicating yourself to the fight against White supremacy, there are more than a few landmines to avoid, just as in any other social justice work. If you are White, don't assume that you will be the savior of Black people or other people of color. In fact, I even problematize the concept of an "ally." An ally is a temporary relationship, helping someone else achieve their goals. The Native American community offers the more radical concept of a co-conspirator, someone who understands that their existence is mutually intertwined with others. In African philosophy, we call this concept *Ubuntu*, "I am because We are." In other words, we are interdependent human beings who cannot define ourselves, our struggle, and our human rights without each other. People who are defined as White have as much to gain from the defeat of White supremacy as those designated as its victims. As people of color, our intersectional standpoints have compelled us to bear witness to the human tragedy of White supremacy in a way invisible to most White people.

White people challenging White supremacy bring White privilege to the fight and can deploy it in measured ways in tandem with race-conscious people of color to build a human rights movement in the

United States. White people have the power to legitimize a struggle, a movement, in a way that will be heard because White authority trumps all others in our society. It is inevitable that when a White person describes something as racist they are seen as more credible than when a person of color does so, just as men get applauded for saying the same things that women get criticized for. The challenge is to rise above White guilt and a false sense of subordination in order to use this power and privilege responsibly in the service of justice, rather than pretend it doesn't exist or doesn't matter.

Standing in solidarity does not mean standing in front. Standing up against racial injustices does not mean eclipsing other voices, denying their realities, or assuming undemocratic leadership. It does mean that White people more often work closer to the centers of power and have access to more resources. They can help build and share leadership skills and roles. To do so, they must increase their longevity in the movement and their level of commitment, because radical consciousness is a lifelong gift that you can re-gift, but cannot give back even if one is not always an activist. White antiracists bring representation, authenticity, and strong symbolism to the movement to end White supremacy. Do not underestimate the vital urgency of your role in countering White supremacy. Your life, and that of your family, may depend on it.