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Are You Supporting White Supremacy?

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[Home](#) > A checklist to determine if you are supporting white supremacy (opinion)

Are you supporting white supremacy?

Submitted by Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt on January 12, 2018

For faculty of color, women and particularly those scholars who are outspoken about dismantling the master narratives of white supremacy within our colleges and universities, playing by the rules is neither an option nor an obligation. It is, in fact, a terrible burden. A burden to allow an oppressive system breathing down our necks, while we continue to work within institutions that treat us as mere bodies representing “diversity” or what Patti Duncan has called “[Hot Commodities, Cheap Labor: Women of Color in the Academy](#) ^[1].”

My own cathartic moment arrived when I was able to write about my experience and those of other postcolonial scholars in my book, [The Postcolonial Citizen: The Intellectual Migrant](#) ^[2], in a chapter titled “Threatening Bodies, Dangerous Knowledge, Legal Interventions.” It was 2001. The problem of exclusions and a lack of “due process” experienced by various postcolonial scholars were widespread.

After many years and many battles, and after much thought, I have created a list of qualities and attributes of those that overtly or covertly support or contribute to a culture of mundane and everyday white supremacy within our institutions. Such mundane acts manifest themselves in who is hired, who is tenured and promoted, whose scholarship is (de)valued, who receives the campus awards for teaching and service, whose voice is heard, whose ideas are policed, who is tone policed, and who is called out as not being “civil” -- a coded word for speaking against the status quo of white privilege.

Participating in acts that enable white supremacist structures to exist obstructs the social justice and antiracist work that many of us are trained to do within

the academy. We are marked as troublemakers when in truth we are trouble identifiers.

Here then is a list of 15 “troubles” that I have identified to help others in academe recognize your (un)conscious contributions to white supremacy.

- You work in a position of power in a predominantly white institution, and while you claim to be working for social justice, you do nothing to change the white supremacist power structures within your departments, committees and institutional decision-making process.
- When your colleagues who are marginalized complain to you about their “oppressive” work conditions, you think that they are difficult.
- When your colleagues and students claim that they experienced microaggressions, your response is “I am so sorry. This is unbelievable!”
- When you are asked to nominate your students and faculty colleagues for awards or leadership positions, your first instinct is to nominate those that are “stellar” (mostly men) and obviously “white.” It doesn’t occur to you that you are implicitly supporting a logic of meritocracy that is built on this racist assumption that everyone has had the same access and opportunities.
- When it comes to understanding your own white privilege, you get very angry if a faculty member of color points out to you where and how your privilege is operating. You deem such critiques as “uncivil” and as not supporting a collegial environment.
- You are aware of the many wrongs that you see your institution is doing to your marginal faculty and students, and while you sympathize with people of color and marginal students and faculty members behind your closed door, you never openly confront your institution.
- When a professor of color stands up in your faculty meetings and expresses their frustrations about inequity, you go to your trusted colleagues (the next day) and ask, “Why is s/he or them always so angry?”
- When you are on a hiring committee, you think that the writing samples by your white candidates of choice are stellar, while what is “stellar” about the candidates of color is, of course, their ethnicity.
- You never fail to articulate publicly your commitment for increasing diversity within your institution, but when on a hiring committee you express your strong hesitation to let go of your stellar candidate in exchange for a candidate who you perceive as only adding to your institution’s diversity mission.
- When people of color (faculty members and students) complain to you about discrimination and racism, you actively discourage them to report their cases, and often try to convince them that “it must be a misunderstanding.”
- You think of yourself as an ally to your faculty of color colleagues, but cannot understand why your white students are so upset when professors of color teach and critique sites of white privilege.
- In your institutional reviews for tenure and promotion cases, you advise and critique your faculty of color colleagues to be more sensitive and

mindful in respecting the viewpoint of our students. By “our students” you really mean “our white students.”

- You benefit so much from the system that you have decided to stay out of all of this “identity politics.”
- You have never thought of yourself as an ally to any of the causes of faculty of color and you never have any time to go to any events that they and other marginal folks have organized (where they express their everyday struggles). But you will happily go to an event if Ta-Nehisi Coates is speaking in town.
- Claudia Rankine, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Teju Cole’s “[The White-Savior Industrial Complex](#)”^[3] -- all rub you the wrong way.

If you have made it to this point, you are probably feeling quite hypervisible or fragile and have decided to have some hot chamomile tea from a cup that reads “White Tears” or “Black Lives Matter.”

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CounterPunch. She also has a blog called [On Being Brown and Out/Raged](#)”^[6].

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Links

[1] <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/564291/summary>

[2] <https://www.amazon.com/Postcolonial-Citizen-Intellectual-Migrant-Studies/dp/1433106019>

[3] <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843>

[4] <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/03/21/on-being-the-right-kind-of-brown/>

[5] <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/10/31/when-free-speech-dismantles-diversity-initiatives/>

[6] <https://reshmi777.wordpress.com/>