

I Can Fix It!

Volume 1. Racism

2000 people were asked for 5 things individual people can do to end racism. Here are the solutions in our own words.

“This is such a great piece.”

“I find this handy guide incredibly useful.”

“Tough, direct and no-nonsense.”

“This is a good read.”

“Thank you, thank you! I value this work highly.”

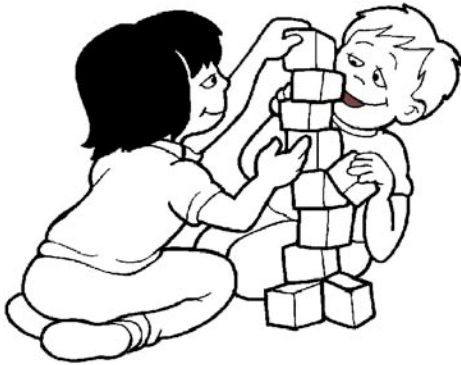
“I love the humor and how it's completely willing to be the opposite of that in the next moment.”

“Seriously, I love it.”

A “Now Art” Project by damali ayo



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Part 1: White People

Do you want to change racism in the world? Guess what? You have to start with yourself! ‘Cause you know what? If you’re not part of the solution, you *are* part of the problem! Here are five easy things you can do starting right now (and continuing for the rest of your life)!

1. Admit It.
2. Listen.
3. Educate Yourself.
4. Broaden Your Experience.
5. Take Action.

Let’s explore these things in a bit more detail. →

Proceed in the order listed. You will be penalized for jumping ahead.



1. Admit It.



"race tag" by damali ayo

"The first step is admitting you have a race"

Be white.

Acknowledge that white is a color and a race. Learn how to say "white people." Don't play dumb. Don't say "I don't know what to say, do, think" or "I don't really have a race." Resist feelings of hopelessness and self pity. Do not invent white suffering. Lose the drama.

Admit that racism exists.

Understand that it's not all about slavery, that there have been many institutionalized racist practices in the history and present of the United States. Understand that all white people reap tremendous benefits from the legacy of slavery, segregation and the continuing effects of the racism it helped create. All white people benefit even if they were not alive during the time of US slavery or if their ancestors immigrated to this country after the Civil War.

Acknowledge that a very real present-day racism arose from social and institutionalized racist practices/laws of the past. Notice where those practices continue, and where you participate in them.

Take notice.

Observe how others are treated. When you walk into a room, bar, club, whatever notice the racial breakdown of the crowd. Getting in the habit of noticing who is around you (and who isn't around you) is easy and promotes general awareness.

See white people. If you are going to identify a person by their race, make sure you identify *all* people by their race. That means saying "I saw this white man." Don't let white be the default race. Spend a week identifying white people by their race, see how it affects you.

Stop thinking of your opinions as objective or the "right way." Instead acknowledge your perspective as coming from a white experience. Realize that people of color may see things differently than you for good reasons.

Understand that reverse racism is an impossibility.

Reflect on the prejudices you grew up with, and then get over them.

2. Listen.

“I've found that really listening to people of color and believing their experience is eye-opening.”



Shut up, already.

Listen to a person of color. No really, just listen. When a person of color is sharing their experiences, resist any urge to jump in and minimize or excuse their feelings. Don't make it about you or what you are feeling in reaction to them. Don't talk too much or say predictable stupid nervous things, just listen. Don't try to fix that person or change their mind. Don't cry. It's not about you.

Understand that when a person of color talks to you about racism, they are trusting you. Treat that trust with the utmost respect.

Honor Experience.

Remember that people of color are sharing their true experiences not merely voicing an opinion. Understand that experience trumps opinion. Remember that people of color have experience with racism than you will never have, but don't use this as an excuse for asking “stupid questions” or not educating yourself.

When a person of color tells you or another white person that something he or she has said is offensive don't get defensive . If you find yourself getting defensive, listen to what that person is saying and try to change your way of thinking.

Consider racism to be a form of violence or abuse.

Honor Outrage.

“If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention.”

When white people mislabel outrage as anger it scares other white people away from doing the work and gives ammunition to racists.

Remember that talking about things or speaking out and being heard is a good way for people to heal from trauma. Don't punish, dismiss, or demean *any* emotion that people of color express in response to racism. Don't tell people of color that their outrage will scare white people or make people stop listening. Don't tell people of color that they should educate white people or be gentle.

Do not silence or stifle the voices of people of color.

Don't impose.

Think about what you say to people before you say it.

Don't impose your views on people of color.

Don't blame people of color for racism.

Let people of color choose what they want to talk about. Don't make every conversation with a person of color all about what you want to share or what you want to learn about. Don't bring up racism just because you are talking to a person of color.

If you do have a racial consciousness, don't be self-righteous about it. Don't brag. Seek to always deepen your understanding instead of striving to get to a "finished" place.

3. Educate Yourself.



“Seriously. Read a book or get on the net.”

Plan it out.

Make a list of questions you have about other races/cultural groups. Find the answers to your questions without asking any people of color to help you.

Realize that for the most part white people don't have to care about or think about what it's like to be a person of color. Take 5 minutes to consider what it's like to be non-white, for 5 minutes choose to care about it. Read 5 novels by people of color. Go to 5 films which are made by people of color. Buy a magazine oriented toward people who are not white. What's it like to look through a magazine where 80% or more of the people are of color? How does the content differ - if at all? Genuinely explore a piece of artwork by a person of color.

Do it right.

Fight the urge to immediately tell a person of color that you have done the above, that's just weird.

Learn about people of color because they are part of your country and society, not because they are “exotic.” Do not view people of color as “different” as if white people are the “norm.” Actively work against institutionalizing whiteness

as the norm. Do not refer to people of color as “diverse peoples,” this is racist and grammatically incorrect.

Study the differences between racism, prejudice and discrimination.

Educate yourself about the history of race and racism in the United States. Learn about the economic basis and effects of racism, and the institutional powers that perpetuate racism. Actively seek out the perspectives and insights of those who are doing “the heavy lifting” with regards to fighting (eliminating) racism. Find scholars who work on this subject instead of turning your friends of color or strangers of color into your personal educational system. If you have questions after you’ve done some reading, read more.

A new method.

Stop allowing yourself to be brainwashed into believing stereotypes. Acknowledge and examine our society's stereotypes about people of color. Assume you've been influenced by them. What are they? Make a list. Know what you are working to change.

Don't assume that everyone is either a person of color or a white person.

Change your thinking. Turn things around. Instead of asking why all the kids of color are sitting together in the lunchroom, ask why all of the white kids are sitting together. Instead of asking why something is all black, ask why something is all white. Instead of wondering why no people of color attend an event or join a group, ask why the group only attracts white people.

Stop asking people of color about their hair. Realize this is a larger metaphor for treating people with respect and learning on your own. Don't use your learning process as an excuse for rude behavior.

Deepen your understanding by using the pyramid of culture. At the top, is surface stuff like dance, food, dress, etc. At the bottom are all the deeper issues such as cultural history. Many persons not of that culture only get involved at the top.

Teach your children, and allow them to teach you. Be willing to be uncomfortable. Allow your brain to hurt. Understand that race and racism presents complexities and contradictions. Do not try to reduce or simplify.

Suggested reading:

Teaching Learning Anti-Racism by Louise Derman Sparks and Carol Phillips
What if All the Children are White by Sonia Nieto, Antonia Darder, Vivian Paley
White Awareness by Judy Katz
Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? by Beverly Tatum
Uprooting Racism by Paul Kivel

White Lies by Maurice Berger
White Like Me by Tim Wise
How to Rent a Negro by damali ayo

4. Broaden Your Experience.

“Caution: Please don’t do this until you’ve successfully completed steps 1-3.”

The obvious and the simple.

Learn about other cultures, not by asking questions but by spending time with people (without interrogating them).



Hold a door for, or do some other small un-returnable kindness for a person of color. Smile at someone who is not white. Stop expecting things in return.

Get out there.

Put yourself into environments predominantly attended by people of color, where you are likely to get to know more people of color. Whether it's a professional organization, local political/cultural event, a community group or church, a friend's birthday party, an art event, whatever. Go alone. Don't bring your comforting posse, or some friend to share or analyze your exotic experience with. Do not treat this as an exotic experience. See it as living in the real world instead of the limited world you now live in. Observe without photos mental or actual. Don't act like a tourist. Don't stay till it is cleanup time. Don't take more than you give

Donate and volunteer with racial justice groups that will put you in situations where you are the racial minority. Don't then brag about this experience and say you know what it's like to be "a minority" or a person of color. Never use the phrase "reverse racism" since there is no such thing.

Make a commitment to participate in and develop an in-depth appreciation of an activity that helps you to shift your awareness into cultures of color from a mind-body perspective (music, food, dance, language, philosophy). Engage in something that helps you to develop a new vocabulary with which to relate to people.

Make new friends.

Diversify your circle of friends. Reach out further than you have before. It's much easier to make friends with people when you approach them from an already educated point of view. Remember that people of color have a shared historical experience and that we are also each individuals. Make it a point to cultivate friends from a range of backgrounds. Stereotypes become popular when we don't get to know people as individuals. Don't get lazy or give up. It takes time to get to know people.

Befriend a person of color. No really, but not in that token, "Let's have lunch" way, but in that, "I know your birthday and know what you actually want for your birthday" way. Eat together, laugh together, cry together, dance together, love each other. Build the kind of friendship in that, "5 years from now, when you (or I) screw up a relationship, you (or I) can crash on the couch for a month" way. Expect nothing in return, not because they are a person of color, but because they are human, and it might just not work out.

Raise smart kids.

Stop passing down racist prejudices to your children. Expose them to differences early on. Actively encourage your children and all children to develop relationships with people of color, both adults and children. Create opportunities for them to play and socialize in racially integrated environments. Break down segregation by going the extra step of providing rides for play/study dates to and from their friends' homes.

5. Take Action.



“Now where do I put my foot after I've taken it out of my mouth?”

Don't just talk about it. Be about it.
Make an action plan. Include the following:

Consider racism your problem to solve.

Always confront racism, ignorance and inappropriate behavior/language when you see, hear, read, or experience it. If someone says something racist don't laugh awkwardly or ignore it. Use the power of your voice. Interrupt/address racism no matter how uncomfortable it makes you, no matter who you are

required to confront. Do not make exceptions for your family, your friends, or in the workplace because you fear the consequences.

When speaking out against racism, be gentle but firm. Practice civility but also directness. Set that person straight. White people are more likely to listen to you than to the person that they are offending. Leave the over-niceness at home. Being overly-nice only makes a safe atmosphere for racism and an unsafe atmosphere for others (particularly people of color) to confront it head on.

Challenge white people to talk about racism. Learning “what not to say” is not the point. Understanding how racism works and how it can be dismantled is the point. Help fellow white people to learn not just react.

Be a visible person in the fight against racism.

In the media:

When a racist incident occurs in the public eye, write a letter to the editor of your local paper condemning the behavior. Identify yourself as a white person in your letter.

At work:

Whatever your place of profession, eliminate institutionalized practices that are discriminatory towards people of color or rewarding white privilege. Hire, retain, and promote people of color. Maintain a wide range of employees.

In the community:

Become involved in an organization that is involved with communities of color, like a church, a school, a non-profit, a business or a reading group. Make your involvement more than financial. Involve your time, energy, participation and emotional connection. Stay committed to this organization for at least three years.

With your kids:

Since people often live in mostly segregated parts of any city/town, send your kids to public schools if you live in a city, and demand that students of color are recruited into the advanced/honors/AP classes. Integrate the books and toys in your children’s school, and at home. Demand teachers of color for the sake of your kids not just for the kids of color. Promote that a racially integrated educational environment is the best for white kids as well as for kids of color. Fight for equal education for kids of all races. Expose movements that subtly privilege white children over children of color.

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A “Now Art” Project by damali ayo

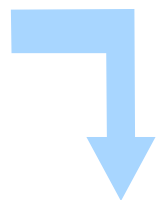
Part 2: People of Color

Are you sick of racism? Of course you are! But you want to do something to help move things forward without going crazy from frustration. Here are five easy things you can do starting right now! (and continuing for the rest of your life).

1. **Get Real.**
2. **Speak Out.**
3. **Educate Yourself.**
4. **Build Ties.**
5. **Take Care.**

Let's explore these things in a bit more detail. →

Complete all five. You will be penalized for missing out.



1. Get Real.



“It’s not that easy being green.”

Be yourself! Do not validate or try to invalidate the stereotypes about people of color. The best way to get rid of the negative images and put more positive images is for people to see who you REALLY are.

Stop playing into white negative stereotypes. We don't have to live down to the expectations of whites. Practice self-love. Teach your children to love themselves and others for who they are.

Be who you are, not what you see on TV, a movie or in a music video.

Love yourself and one another. We have too much in common to not support each other. Don't do things to tear each other down. If white people see us tearing each other down, they will think it is okay for them to do the same. This includes not killing each other.

Be generous. Be kind. Lose the drama.

2. Speak Out.

“You didn't really just say that, did you?”

Remember that you are not powerless.

“I'd like it if people of color wouldn't let me get away with racist comments or behaviors, even when I am completely clueless and have good intentions.”



“still from china girl” by damali ayo

Do not be fearful of speaking up if a white person, regardless of age or status, says a racist comment or joke. Your silence indicates you think find their racism appropriate.

Talk to white people. Tell white people what to do to fight racism when they ask. Feel free to carry copies of this document with you for a handy and quick way to address racism and the white question of “What do I do?”

Listen to white people. It may be hard, but if you listen to them, then you can require them to listen to you.

Explore books, television programs, documentaries and films that deal with racism and the history and experiences of people of color. Share those resources with white people. This can be causal and social, or more official like starting a racism library in your office, church, community center, email list, co-op etc.

Make your presence known. Get involved in your children's school, team, or parent-teacher organization, if you're not already. Find out about any enrichment/advanced learning programs that are available, and be sure your kids (and other kids of color) are considered for them.

3. Educate Yourself.



You don't *have* to teach white people, but you *do* have to educate yourself and other people of color.

Do you know who invented the traffic light or the adjustable wrench? Who is the voice of Elmo? Who created web-based email? People of color! Make sure you know your history and that your kids (and white kids) know these facts. Make sure your kids' teachers know these facts too. Join parents together and create a curriculum that can be photocopied and used in the schools.

Teach the children in your life from an early age to have pride in who they are and their race. Facts can never be destroyed with lies and stereotypes. Prepare your kids for miseducation until the educational system is fixed. Teach your kids what their schools do not. Create role models for your kids so they have someone to look up to and hold close to their heart when they face racism.

Don't let people reproach your heroes. If they do, counter with negative facts about white heroes as an example of how it feels and how it's not useful.

Take pride in learning. Stop thinking of education and good grammar as "white things."

Educate yourself on the history of race and racism in the United States. Teach your children the real history of the United States.

Acknowledge and examine our society's stereotypes about people of color. Assume you've been influenced by them. Work on your stereotypes of, or prejudice towards, other groups. Research how stereotypes are created and how they are perpetuated. Knowledge is power.

Deal with your own issues of prejudice toward people within your race. Populations of color have some deeply ingrained thoughts that do serious harm without a white person ever being in the room. Deconstruct your views and see where they have been influenced by internalized racism. Change those views.

Recognize that various groups of color have many histories, issues, heroes, stories. Learn them all.

4. Build Ties.

There is power in numbers!

Join together as people of color. Don't limit your friends or experiences to your group. Resist segregation. Don't set your group apart in an effort to be better than another group of people of color. Stop comparing oppressions. Stop competing for who has the biggest population or who is treated best or worst.



Know the interconnected history of people of color in the United States. Do you know what groups were forced to work under deadly conditions after American slavery was outlawed? Do you know which Asian American woman held the hand of Malcolm X when he was dying?

Suggested reading: *A Different Mirror* by Ronald Takaki

Put yourself into environments where you are likely to get to know more people of color, of a race other than yours. Whether it's a professional organization, local political/cultural event, a community group or church, a friend's birthday party, an art event, whatever. Go alone. Don't bring your comforting posse. Do not treat this as an exotic experience. See it as living in the real world instead of the limited world you now live in. Observe without photos mental or actual. Don't act like a tourist.

Don't treat other people of color the way white people treat you. Do not talk about other any race/ethnicity/nationality/religious group/sexual orientation the way you would not want others talking about you. Instead, make an effort to learn about all groups.

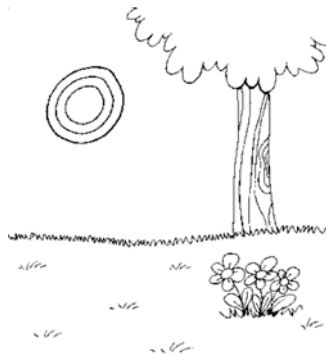
Don't assume that everyone is either white or a person of color. Let people self-define and respect their identities. Don't assume that "white blood" makes someone "less of a person of color."

Make a commitment to recruit white people to become involved in organizations within communities of color.

Cultivate relationships with white people you like. Create a balanced friendship with these people that includes real sharing about non-race issues as well as an alliance focused on fighting racism.

If you have children or are involved with children, make a conscious effort to create opportunities for them to play and socialize in racially integrated environments.

5. Take Care.



Racism and combating it take their toll.

Remember that you don't have to educate white people.

Know that there are white people who care about eliminating racism.

Train your white friends to interrupt racism in the world so when you are together the responsibility doesn't always fall to you.

Remember that white people have a lot of learning to do. Appreciate progress as they aim toward perfection.

Keep a positive attitude. If we are angry all the time because the "MAN" is out to get us then the "MAN" has us right where he wants us.

Walk away when you are too tired, too angry or just don't feel like confronting racism. Make your health and sanity a priority. A good balance is to walk away but let people know why you are walking away. Then you've said something without getting into a long or frustrating discussion.

If you feel like your anger will do more harm than good, take it elsewhere, like to the gym or a trusted listener.

Have a safe person/group where you can vent your anger, sadness, rage over racism when the emotions bubble up, so that you can heal, and also so that you can think clearly about your most effective options if you want to respond to a triggering incident.

Don't let racism drive you to harm yourself in any way. Don't abuse yourself on top of the racism abusing you. Keep healthy of mind, body and spirit.

Cry when you need to cry, yell when you need to yell.

Resist drawing enemy lines.

Make sure you have a regular outlet to replenish your energy. Racism takes a toll on your body and mind. Make sure you have a way to put it out of your mind every once in a while and go for a walk, meditate, get a massage, have a dinner with a good friend, or laugh at your favorite comedian.

I Can Fix It!

Volume 1. Racism

A “Now Art” Project by damali ayo

About the project

Artist, author and speaker damali ayo was challenged by a member of one of her audiences to present a series of comprehensive and immediate solutions to the problem of racial tension and the impact of racism on communities. In response she employed her philosophy that “the more people arrive at the solutions the better chance they have of working for a wider range of people.” damali put the task to her email list of 2000+ people. This list of people were given the mission to come up with 5 things white people can do to solve racism and 5 things people of color can do to solve racism. They sent their responses to damali, and she compiled this guide using their words. The guide is made available free of charge to anyone who wants to use it. **Please note:** this guide mainly addresses interpersonal interactions. Institutional racism continues to need institutionalized solutions.

Please photocopy this guide and distribute it freely. The more people who use the same solutions, the better chance we have of making progress as a society. Ask libraries, bookstores, coffee shops and grocery stores to place a stack where people can grab one. Put it in the lobby at your doctor’s office.

About the contributors

This project was co-authored by the over 2000 people who are members of damali ayo’s “email family.” The contributors are of many races from the United States and countries around the world. **You can join this email list on damaliayo.com**

About Now Art

“Now Art” is a series of participatory art/performance projects. damali offers this genre of work as “Now Art” because the works are immediate, accessible, participatory, low-cost, and deal with current issues that we face as a community/society. When you participate you are creating a moment- something that happens in the “now” and hopefully generates a cascade of thought and change for the future.

The works are things you can do in your life, your community, your school, your neighborhood. When you join the mailing list, damali will send you concepts, instructions and sometimes even a full kit to enact each work.



About damali ayo



Artist and author damali ayo first reached wide-ranging audiences with her satirical Web site “rent-a-negro.com” The Web site expertly entices viewers into a service that allows them to rent a pleasing and friendly African American for social and business occasions. The project is a cunning exploration of race relations and the commodification of racial difference.

ayo's book, *How to Rent a Negro* expands this much needed dialogue on race. The book is acclaimed as “one of the most trenchant and amusing commentaries on contemporary race relations.”

damali's work has been featured in *Harpers Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, *The Independent UK*, *Radio Popolare Italy*, *The Tavis Smiley Radio Show*, *Public Radio International*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *ABCNews.com*, *MSNBC.com*, *Nerve.com*, and *Salon.com*. damali ayo won a national federation of community broadcasters 2005 silver reel award for arts features and reporting.

To bring damali ayo to speak to your school,
company or organization
email: info@damaliayo.com