

Dear White Allies: Stop Unfriending Other White People Over Ferguson

Earlier today, as I was scrolling through my news feed, I noticed declarative statement after declarative statement from a number of my white friends either threatening to, or professing that they'd just unfriended several of *their* white friends based on "wrong," "terrible," "racist," (read: conflicting) views about the grand jury's decision to not indict the white police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown – an unarmed Black teenager – in Ferguson.

If you haven't been following the story, start with this Jon Stewart recap here.

With each "unfriend" post, I felt myself getting angrier and angrier, wondering how on earth white people (who understand racism) disconnecting from white people (who don't) was supposed to help anyone.

As a Black person enraged by the blatant racism in Ferguson, I felt involuntarily benched by my emotions; I was too angry, sad, etc to engage on the subject period, let alone with white people who felt differently *and* required that I engage "objectively." This stood out to me as a moment in which white allies could come in really handy. So, I shared the post below on my Spectra Speaks page in an attempt to articulate my thoughts and propose an alternative to disconnection: empathic engagement with the "other side" on my behalf.

The post was well received and felt too important not to share on my blog, so here it goes... After reading I encourage you to share your thoughts — on being a good ally, on facilitating critical conversations, on connecting with *unlike* minds — by commenting below.

Dear white allies, this is not the time to "unfriend." This is the time to "engage."

This is the time to remember that the outrage you feel can in no way match my own and therefore you have way more emotional capacity than I do to talk some sense into the "other side."

This is the time to remember that your "solidarity" does not render you powerless; in fact, the entire point of your solidarity is to lend the power you DO have to folks who do not.

And by the way, this is the time to remember that you *do* have power.

It may not feel like much – your empathy may temporarily make you forget that you're not like Brown, you're not "one of us" and that in fact you are still one of "them" – but please try and remember how USEFUL you could be should you decide to be brave enough to speak up to the folks more likely to hear YOU than me.

I'm seeing one too many white people bragging about defriending other white people. I don't need your condolences. I don't need rash actions that absolve you of the responsibility of facilitating hard conversations with folks I will never be able to reach.

I need you to step up in a major way, and leverage the connections you DO have to address ignorance with conversation and interrogate white privilege with compassion. Because I will not do this. I cannot do this.

My rage as a black person witnessing yet another moment in the endless cycle of racism in the US prevents me from engaging in "level headed" conversations with people who see this terribly unjust Ferguson ruling as just another news story to banter about at the water cooler. But you, don't do me any further injustice by claiming to stand in solidarity with me while really

(really) excusing yourself of the hard work that is engaging with fellow white people on this issue. Don't hide behind "being a good ally" without actually doing any work beyond merely echoing my cries of pain, anger, and soul wrenching disappointment.

You're a socially conscious white person? You don't share *their* views? It's disappointing to hear your friends say racist things? You don't wanna talk to *them*? I hear you. I really do. But if you don't speak to "them" who will?

Who will?

(Hint: Not me.)

So before you squander the opportunity before you in an attempt to demonstrate your solidarity, ask yourself which choice would be easier: unfriending the guy who attended your birthday party last year because he posted support of the non indictment OR responding to his post with an open ended question to begin a (likely long and strenuous) conversation?

What would a good... actually, forget good... What would a useful, valuable, effective ally do?

We need you to be brave, now more than ever. Stop with the Unfriending. Speak up.

And to those of you doing this already, thank you thank you thank you.

www.spectraspeaks.com

Here is a great resource on calling people in from Everyday Feminism:

"Calling In: A Quick Guide on When and How"

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/01/guide-to-calling-in/>