

## Taking Action for Racial Justice

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The ongoing protests and marches for racial justice, precipitated by the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others, demonstrate the tragically overdue need to address the structural racism pervading this country and its policies and practices. The protests have opened up space for all to take action, and many have embraced the opportunity to respond. I attended a protest in my Bay Area town that swelled to 2,000 people singing, kneeling, and calling together for change. Organizers had expected so few attendees that they had to scramble for audio equipment, while the crowd passed speakers' messages back through the ranks. Boarded-up stores became inspirational art canvases for spreading messages of grief, anger, hope, and love. At the conclusion, a speaker demanded of the crowd, "What will you do after you get home today? What actions will you take?"

Clearly, much needs to be done. The origins and history of the United States are steeped in racism, colonialism, and violence. The structures of racial violence still run deep. Fred Blackwell, CEO of San Francisco Foundation, writes in "[America's Other Virus](#)" that "We need change that is transformative, because work in the margins will not produce the change we seek." But how do we start?



Melody Cooper, sister of the [New York City birdwatcher](#), called in an [op-ed](#) for each of us to refuse to accept racism, to "be brave and challenge it all," every "cruel joke or rude behavior." Each of us can commit to that type of external action, as well as introspection that helps us better understand and address the unconscious biases within each of us. We also can support those organizations fighting on the ground each day for racial justice. Local community foundations are one source of information on these groups. Here in the Bay Area, [East Bay Community Foundation](#), [San Francisco Foundation](#), and [Silicon Valley Community Foundation](#) list local, state-based, and national groups working tirelessly to address racial and social justice.

We can also commit to taking action for racial justice through our work whenever possible. My own work has focused over the years on ecological and environmental justice, and so I welcomed recent [interviews with black environmental leaders](#) offering recommendations on how to act on both climate change and racism.

Sam Grant, executive director of Minnesota affiliate of the climate group 350.org, powerfully observed that "Police violence is an aspect of a broader pattern of structural violence, which the climate crisis is a manifestation of," he said. "Healing structural violence is actually in the best interest of all human beings." Texas Southern University Professor Robert Bullard, an

expert on environmental racism, called on large environmental groups to “embrace this whole concept of justice, fairness, and equity,” adding that “The people who are feeling the worst impacts of climate, their voices have got to be heard.” Author Heather McGhee concluded that anti-racism must be “baked on into the goals” of environmental groups, because “both political racism and environmental racism are drivers of our excess pollution and climate denialism.”

The structural changes we need to make require our commitment for the long term, but the benefits to all will be incalculable. What actions will you take?

*Linda Sheehan*

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