I am a white person. And this article was written for other white people. Racism is our issue that we need to solve. We created the racist systems — yes, even in fraternity/sorority life. White supremacy is so prevalent in our existence that over half of the fraternities and sororities existing today began because their members were not wanted or allowed to be in existing organizations. We need to take ownership of the harm that we have caused, regardless of our participation or intention. Our organizations and institutions can create an anti-racist culture, but we need to be honest that our ability does not always match our desire. Our profit and political motives continue to precede our moral responsibility to address the issues in our organizations — this needs to change.

For most of their history, we have allowed our organizations to not address racism in the name of political motives and our members “first amendment rights.” For organizations built on self-betterment, this is deplorable and needs to stop. Our industry cannot exist in this type of dichotomous environment. We need to remain committed to educating ourselves. This means reading, writing, watching, and listening. It is not the responsibility of our Black colleagues and students to educate us and teach us how to erase our racist views. If you wanted to learn how to cook a meal, would you message multiple chefs asking them how to make it? Or would you look up a few recipes, read the reviews, and give it a try yourself?

We Need to Examine Our Intentions
The recent murders of Black people in this country have forced white people to examine our whiteness and the role we play in racism, injustice, and oppressive systems in our country. Though this is not a new problem, social media has recently served as a platform for many professionals (and organizations) to declare their solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. While many of these narratives have expressed outrage for the recent acts of police brutality, we have not owned the role our whiteness has and continues to play in these oppressive systems that disproportionately affect Black people, both in our country and in fraternity/sorority life. Going online and professing ourselves as allies puts the attention on us, ultimately preventing the attention from being on Black and indigenous people of color (BIPOC), minority people, where it belongs. We need to move away from the notion that allyship is something that we can “be” and start thinking about it as something that we “do.”

While support and solidarity are necessary, our reason for doing this work needs to be as important as actually doing it. Many of us have noted our commitment to this issue because we
want things to be better for our Black friends, colleagues, students, you name it. What we have failed to realize is racism is not an issue we should be empathizing with, but something we need to take responsibility for and be committed to eliminating. In many ways, the impact of our allyship is performative and self-serving. Many of our statements, social media sentiments, and actions have been rooted in our want to “save” Black people, otherwise known as White Savior Complex. Our Black students and colleagues don’t need saving; they need to be respected, valued, and given the same opportunities we are. Here are some questions to ask yourself when exploring if you are acting as a savior, or performatively:

- Am I informed entirely of what I am speaking out against?
- Am I acknowledging my responsibility for the systemic issues that provided context for the relevant tragedy that I am denouncing?
- Am I seeking praise, approval, or admiration by doing or saying something?
- Am I committed and prepared to have this discussion offline with other white people? What about white people who don’t share my views?
- What was my response to the most recent racist comment I heard or action I saw? Why does that matter?
- What will I do next time someone does or says something racist?

Yes, sometimes activism requires us to be loud. To shout from the rooftops our disdain for what is happening. But more often than not, it requires us to do things no one will ever see. Our profession needs to be less performative and more informative when it comes to allyship. In the words of Holiday Phillips (@holidayphillips), “We need to actually be down for the cause — and not the cause of looking like a woke person.”

**Tangible Next Steps**

Now is the time to “be about it.” I am confident we can marry our desires with our actions, and here are eight tangible steps we can take.

1. **Remove letters of recommendation (LOR) and dismantle the culture of preferential legacy treatment in the Panhellenic recruitment process.** By the nature of their history, LOR are disproportionately oppressive to BIPOC. These letters inflict hardship on non-legacies, a majority of them being non-white, and systematically restrict their ability to join in the name of “accomplishment.” Nothing says, “we want to remain the same” like “give us a recommendation from someone who has been a member before.” While the NPC has revised the unanimous agreement to prohibit requiring letters of
recommendation, the real power lies with the inter/national organizations; they need to support removing them as an option for alumnae to write.

2. **We need to allocate financial resources to organizations and governing councils equitably.** Nothing is more uncomfortable than seeing a delegation of 20 students at a leadership conference, and only three of them are NPHC members. There is no doubt that other programs and services are structured comparably and produce a similar result. Financial disparities exist between governing councils, but they also exist between chapters and within an organization. We spend way too much time making sure everything is “fair” and not enough time addressing the actual needs of our students. Just like we “meet students where they are,” we need to “give them what they need” — and that includes equitably distributing financial resources.

3. **Don’t require that volunteers and staff be alumni of your organization/institution to work with students.** By doing this, we inadvertently create homogeneous environments that are often not conducive to learning spaces for BIPOC/minority members or new ideas. In the words of Henry Ford, “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” We need to do more than adding just one female on a fraternity advising board or one NPHC facilitator at your leadership program. The people working with our organizations need to reflect our membership and the students we work with. We need to be bringing people to the table to help us get to where we want to be.

4. **Stop tokenizing BIPOC/minority members.** Our organizations tokenize members in public marketing with exaggerated frequency to create the illusion of diversity. This presence often leads to a misleading outward appearance of our organizations being inclusive. Tokenism has both individual and organizational impacts. BIPOC often feel dehumanized and depersonalized as “the token.” Tokenism also contributes to the concept of role encapsulation, which means a person has to play a role based on the stereotypes of their group (Neimann, 1999). For example, the only Black woman in a Panhellenic chapter gets a recommendation to be the Diversity and Inclusion Committee chair. We need to consistently check ourselves to make sure we see the value of diversity and what it brings to the table. We also need to confront our fears and start cultivating an environment that BIPOC/minorities want to join.

5. **Treat racism as a form of hazing.** By definition, hazing causes discomfort and is personally degrading — racism produces the same outcomes. But similar to hazing, we lean on the explanation that racism exists outside of fraternity/sorority life, too; therefore, the
solution is not our responsibility (Noel, 2018). We need to stop allowing our members, students, and alumni to use their first amendment rights as a shield for racist behavior. If our organizations claim to care about diversity, we need to actively combat instances of hate surrounding discrimination, prejudice, and racism. This type of behavior needs to have accountability measures, which include but are not limited to the removal of one’s membership.

6. **Pay people to do the work.** While well intended, our DEI committees typically exist in a performative sense. Virtually every inter/national organization and campus who made a statement used their DE&I committee as a PR talking point. These messages focused on the fact that “we have one” as opposed to “here is what we are doing with it.” Bottom line: we need to invest in our DE&I work the same way we would with any other important area of development. Making change doesn’t only take time, it takes money. Follow [@OfficialMillennialBlack](https://www.instagram.com/OfficialMillennialBlack/) on Instagram to read more on this topic.

7. **Stop pigeonholing DEI work to one person.** We do this by encouraging students to create a DEI chair, and we also do this in our industry by designating one staff person (typically the BIPOC/minority staff person) to do this work. Instead, we need to put more focus on how we can expand this work and make it relevant to every area of our organization. This includes changing position descriptions, creating strategic plans with these areas of focus, and electing student leaders/hiring professionals who are committed to this work.

8. **Work with legal counsel who will deem DEI education as grant fundable.** Money makes educational experiences possible (mostly at the headquarters level), and many times, operating budgets do not account for the level of education we want to provide to our members. As an industry, we need to align ourselves with legal counsels who will work with us to ensure our DEI educational initiatives are grant fundable. This way, we can have the financial resources we need to research and implement best practices in whatever way makes sense for our organizations.

In order to address racism in our organizations, we need to own our truths and act with intentionality. To whom much is given, much is expected. And our whiteness gives us a lot. It’s time we start expecting more from one another.

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