

So, you want to stand with me?

A letter from Tierionna Pinkston

On Friday, a white woman who teaches on the South Side of Chicago reached out to me for perspective. Her email was thoughtful and in short asked me this question: **How do I better educate my white friends and family, particularly those who have limited interaction with Black folks?** If you know me, you know I was pretty excited and began thinking about how to respond. Then, Saturday happened. Then, Sunday happened. And the email I started was written against the backdrop of flames. I started a response to her while both of my cities were on fire: Chicago and Louisville. Chicago is where I live with my family and Louisville is my hometown and where a piece of my heart resides. *[Note: If you've missed it, the following murders or incidents have happened recently and it's critical context to have. [Breonna Taylor](#), [Ahmaud Arbery](#), [Chris Cooper](#), [Tony McDade](#) and [George Floyd](#)]*

Just like that, it all changed. The relevance of my response changed. The stakes changed. Quickly. I decided to pull myself together to be able to respond just as swiftly.

That same question has continued to come forth in various ways over the last few days. My non-Black friends want to know how we are and how they can help. Some of them are already involved in the work & some of them are not.

1. **Educate yourself:** This cannot be overstated. [When you know better, you do better.](#) You must confront your own bias and the social construction of your ideas. You must begin to understand systematic racism and the history of oppression in our country. You must understand power structures and the way that they continue to leave oppressed groups voiceless. You must understand the sociopolitical context of the world right now, particularly with the murder of Black bodies and the lack of police accountability. Unfortunately, this list is too long but start with this photo



and begin doing your research.

This is bigger than social media beef. This is bigger than looting. These are people's lives. [You don't get to opt out](#) or ignore the facts, patterns, or conditions that have created the outcry we see today. Here is a link to my [reading list](#). It continues to be updated. I am also recommending [these resources](#), as a good way to continue learning. A couple may be mentioned in the longer document above.

2. **Speak up. Stand up.** No longer can you be an educator who serves Black and Brown bodies and be silent. You may have family members who have racist opinions or ideas. You may have folks in your social media networks who spout racist words. Stop being silent. We need you. The movement can't rest on our shoulders and backs alone. We need you to be uncomfortable. You may get into some arguments and have some friends who don't speak to you anymore. People have paid for your comfort and privilege with their lives and so if you lose friends along the way, that's okay. Racism continues to grow the more it's unchecked and unchallenged. It spills into the beliefs of [your kids](#). It creeps into interactions at grocery stores, bus rides, Ubers, and restaurants. Racism is a flame that's burning that can't be ignored, it must be put out.
3. **Donate your money.** There are organizations that are doing this work. They are on the ground. They are helping to bail out those who are being arrested for peaceful protest. They are organizing this movement and have been for a long time. They need your money to continue to do [this work](#) and to

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stand up against the injustice that's happening. These organizations are led by folks who know communities, have connections to tap into, and who can be trusted to put energy into the right places. Here are some local recommendations: [Love & Protect](#) - donate [here](#) . [Liberation Library](#) - donate [here](#). [Assata's Daughters](#) - donate [here](#). [Chicago Community Bond Fund](#) - donate [here](#)

4. **Volunteer your time.** Not everyone is prepared to go to the front lines. That's fine. A lot of people are going. If you are going to get out and protest, do so with intention. Do so with power. Check out [this quick story](#) of the ways some folks banded together in Louisville during the Breonna Taylor protests. If you can't go to the front lines, then help with some of the community organizations that are doing the work. They may need volunteers to do jail support. They may need people to volunteer watching the children of those on the front lines. Some organizations are hosting online sessions and calls to build strategy and also to educate from the ground up. Join them. [Read this](#) and join the letter writing campaign:

Joshua Williams #1292002

Missouri Eastern Correctional Center

18701 Old Highway 66

Pacific, Missouri 63069

Here is [my favorite resource](#) on how to get involved with your time. It's not Chicago based, but really useful.

5. **Check on your Black friends.** We are not okay. We may be safe, but we are not okay. Being Black in America is traumatic. Some of us feel a lot of despair. Some of us are just in a fit of rage. Some of us are optimistic and want to capitalize on the stronger presence of our co-conspirators. Some of us feel all of this at once and it varies depending on the time of the day. Some advice: if you reach out to someone don't be too burdensome. Don't reach out to folks that you don't have a real relationship with either. We don't need the added burden of responding or the pressure of whether we can say we're not okay. Assume that's the answer. For me, the best one has been: *Hi friend! Just wanted to let you know*

I'm thinking about you. No need to respond. Please tell me if you need ANYTHING. There was no pressure to respond or to even account for my emotional space, unless I chose to.

6. **Don't be Amy Cooper.** Your privilege can end lives. It's not personal, it's the truth. Sometimes we assume that because someone teaches in Black and brown communities, or because they have a Black friend. That they don't misuse their privilege. We assume allyship. We assume good intentions. These assumptions allow people off the hook from doing the real work of understanding power and privilege. When they're off the hook, they misuse it during times of stress and anger. If you're not actively doing the self-work needed to be prepared to use your privilege to protect those who don't have it, you stand the [risk of turning into Amy Cooper](#).

[This is what you do](#) with your privilege not [this](#).

7. **Vote.** Courtney English said something so powerful in [this post](#). In short, he said that we need to remember that District Attorneys, State Attorney Generals, state judges, and local judges are elected officials. He reminded us that juries are built from voter rosters. In the case of Ahmaud Arbery, so many of the elected officials were okay with what happened to him. I don't know about you, but I don't do enough research on who is being put into those seats. There are organizations that do. Share them with us. If you know where our local and state officials stand on issues of race and justice, share it. Put together a brochure. Do a zoom call. Stop voting aimlessly & letting folks off the hook because they've always been in that seat. People in power make decisions that can save or protect the lives of Black and brown communities and our students.
8. **Focus on the issues at hand.** People have gotten distracted by the looting that's taken place across the country. Don't get me wrong, looting is not the solution. In our city, and in other cities across America, looting has ravaged our cities. Our communities have had their businesses burned. People have felt unsafe in their homes. It's not good. However, the looting is just a distraction to the issue at hand. We are talking about the public

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lynching of Black bodies. [Here is a video](#) that will help to give you some useful perspective on looting and how it's come to be. Also, let it be known that we are not talking about all the injustice in the world. There are so many groups who are oppressed and who are suffering. This does not render them invalid or their experiences invalid. Right now, we are talking about racism in America with a particular focus on police brutality. It does not mean that all police are murderers. Simply stated, this is what we're talking about now in this moment. Don't be distracted by anything else. Focusing on something else is often a conscious or unconscious move to lessen our discomfort.

- 9. Support Black businesses.** There are Black folks who run businesses that further develop the communities we serve. There are Black folks who are helping empower and enrich their communities by using their time and talent. There are Black folks who hire other Black folks and try to provide safe spaces that give financial stability and are safe to Black bodies. Support them during this time and when this is over. It's another opportunity to make a longer term investment into Black communities and to sometimes help sustain community practices that might otherwise dissipate.
- 10. Listen more than you speak.** People have different perspectives. Many have insight that is different than my own. Listen to us. [Hear us](#). It's more important to learn and [try to understand](#) all the things that you don't know, than it is to be heard. Don't minimize [the experiences](#) of those who are hurting. Don't take this time to play devil's advocate. Take this time to really listen to the things you don't know and will likely [never have to experience](#). **Make space for us.** Some of ya'll are going on with business as usual...still posting pics of your food and summer vacations. Recognize that you have the *privilege* to opt out of what's going on. Instead, can you hold off on operating the usual way to show solidarity with the movement? Holding off on business as usual makes space for others to receive the information they need and to have little distraction from the realities of what is happening to black bodies. Doing this will begin to build trusting relationships to get us through the road ahead.

It is through all of these things that you begin to shift from being an ally to being a [co-conspirator](#). And I need co-conspirators with me now. Allyship isn't enough.

Stand with Me,

Tierionna Pinkston

Instructional Leadership Coach



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