

When I needed you to speak up

KELUNDRA SMITH

The last few weeks have been a tumultuous time in America. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is completely unprecedented in our lifetime, we thought racism would take a day off. Unfortunately, it didn't. In addition to exacerbating inequity related to healthcare access, we also learned about too many Stand Your Ground and police killings of unarmed black people. Exercising their First Amendment rights, many people of all ethnicities took to the streets in protest. Others used their voices to express solidarity on social media. I want to talk about this group of people.

I fear that when non-Black and non-Brown people in particular hear their non-white friends urging them to use their voice, they think we're referring to a Facebook status or a tweet. That is a nice start, and we appreciate the show of solidarity, but that is not enough. Below are instances when people of color need you to speak out against injustice.

1. I need you to speak up in the store when you notice security following black people who are clearly not stealing anything.
2. I need you to speak up when you see a white person cut in front of a person of color in line at the store and pretend not to see them.
3. I need you to speak up when the hostess at the restaurant seats the white family first. (and when they add 18% gratuity to the black family's bill, but not the white people's)
4. I need you to speak up when you see a black person jogging in the park and you hear your friend call their kids to come closer.
5. I need you to speak up when you hear white youth say the "n" word in song lyrics on Tik Tok or IG Live.
6. I need you to speak up when your bestie describes a predominantly Black neighborhood as ghetto.
7. I need you to speak up when you hear anyone use the words black, brown, underserved, poor, disenfranchised, and inner city interchangeably. All of these words mean different things, that is why they are different words.
8. I need you to speak up when someone in your family describes another human being as illegal.
9. I need you to speak up when your misogynistic acquaintances describe a person of color's body as exotic or Amazonian.
10. I need you to speak up when you hear a fan at a football or basketball game call a player a racial slur.
11. I need you to speak up when you notice your friend clutch her purse when a black or Latino man gets on the elevator.
12. I need you to speak up when your friend describes Muslims as suspicious or terrorists.
13. I need you to speak up when your friend describes persons who wear turbans, hijabs or burkas as suspicious or terrorists.

Speaking Up

Racial Justice Toolkit

14. I need you to speak up when the counselor says that the student transferring in from the predominantly black school should not be placed in advanced level classes because they probably won't be able to keep up.
15. I need you to speak up when your teacher colleagues describe the little black girls who talk too much in class as defiant, but describe the white ones as eager to learn.
16. I need you to speak up when you see your kids' summer reading lists and there are no books by writers of color.
17. I need you to speak up when there are no non-white girls on the cheerleading squad or dance team.
18. I need you to speak up when you enter the Chamber of Commerce building and don't see them offering business development resources to minority business owners.
19. I need you to speak up when foundations don't offer grants to entrepreneurs and artists of color.
20. I need you to speak up when you see the upcoming programming at your local theater or art museum and see a huge swath of the population not reflected.
21. I need you to speak up when you look around your nonprofit board room and see nothing but white people.
22. I need you to speak up when all of the contractors and vendors your company engages are owned by white men.
23. I need you to speak up when your colleague asks a woman of color a question about her hair or her diet that you know they wouldn't ask a white woman.
24. I need you to speak up when your supervisor gives you credit for something that you coworker of color either did or helped you with.
25. I need you to speak up when you find out about the meeting after the meeting where decisions actually get made. (Yes, we know about the meeting after the meeting.)
26. I need you to speak up when you're on the search committee for a job applicant and your boss starts leaning toward the white candidate because they just got a vibe that they would be a better fit for the team.
27. I need you to speak up when you see the speaker lineup at a conference or workshop and there is a lack of melanin.
28. I need you to speak up when people make chide remarks about Jewish people owning Hollywood or controlling the banks.
29. I need you to speak up when your relatives describe Asian people the same way they would describe a rug or piece of furniture.
30. I need you to speak up when trans men and woman are misgendered and/or denied healthcare access.
31. I need you to speak up when there is an everyday injustice, because if you speak out then, we don't get to the point where there are people screaming in the streets for the freedom they were born with.
32. I don't need you to speak up in a crisis. As a black person in America, I am groomed to survive crisis. I need you to speak up about the everyday drudgery that makes things more difficult than they have to be.

Possible Debrief Questions

- Share an example when you did speak up; what were the results?
- What are some potential challenges we may encounter when we do speak up?
- What are the ramifications if we do not speak up?
- How can we support each other to promote respect and inclusive behaviors in our daily interactions?

**Editor's note: #12 and #13 have been edited from their original form.*