

Standing Up for Racial Justice

Taking a Stand Brings Peace of Mind

Andy Nash

BEFORE YOU READ: Think about the message, “No freedom ‘til we’re equal.” What does it mean? Give some examples of how that might be true in everyday life.

A Fierce and Rageful Backlash

One of the biggest sources of anxiety for me, over the last few years, has been the growing threat of white supremacist violence. Not that it’s a new threat, or that white supremacy is only enforced through violence. White supremacy is also enforced through a long history of housing, education, and drug policies, to name a few, that put people of color at an extreme disadvantage without an explicit threat of violence. But people have fought back against racist policies, and as these struggles have gained momentum, some (mostly) white people have mounted a fierce and rageful backlash. And it’s frightening.

The Limits of Self-Help

My anxiety has taken the form of poor sleep, lack of focus, and impatience. So a friend started sending me articles and short self-help videos about anxiety. Some of the suggested strategies were fine – exercise, breathe, notice when your mind is spinning, etc.

But there was one strategy that didn’t help: the idea that I should focus on what I can change – myself! The message I got from this advice was: “Never mind all the bad things happening in the world – you can’t control that! Just focus on you!”

This advice made me feel powerless, alone, and more anxious! I’ve always found that I can ease my anxiety by doing something about what’s worrying me – have a conversation I’ve been avoiding, finish a task that’s been hanging over me, or work with others to fight an injustice. I

need to feel some agency in the world, not withdraw from it.

So that’s what I’ve done to ease the anxiety. I work with others in a national group called SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) that organizes white people to take action. Sometimes that entails advocacy, protest, or providing mutual aid to people. Other times it’s meeting in small groups to learn about issues and reflect on the kind of world we want to live in. Always, it’s about providing a caring community where we support each other to live our values.

Getting Peace of Mind by Disrupting Injustice

There’s a reason there’s a pandemic of loneliness in the U.S., and I don’t mean Covid. We are sold individual solutions and products for everything that ails us. But for me, the anxiety was caused by social injustices that people created and that people need to disrupt. Being part of the disruption is what brings me peace of mind and good sleep.

AFTER YOU READ: What is similar about Andy’s story and the story by Annie and Betty on pp. 19-22. Share a time when “being a part of the disruption” brought you peace of mind.



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