

Solidarity Syllabus – October 2018

The Role of White People

This month, host Deepa Iyer is in conversation with Heather Cronk of Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and Olivia Lowery of The Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY) Project. Their conversation examines the role of white activists and organizers in disrupting white supremacy and building bridges with communities of color.

Heather Cronk serves as the Co-Director for [SURJ](#). Born and raised in the South, Heather learned the power of organizing through the Evangelical Christian Church. She was politicized while studying at Wake Forest University Divinity School. She graduated with a Master's of Divinity degree and a strong commitment to social and racial justice. She deepened that commitment through her work with the [New Organizing Institute](#) and [Get Equal](#) before heading to SURJ.

Olivia Lowery is on the steering committee of [The STAY Project](#). Born and raised in Big Stone Gap, VA, Olivia graduated from Hollins University in Roanoke this year and is now an [Appalachian Transition Fellow](#) through [the Highlander Center](#).

Solidarity in Appalachia

Appalachia is often portrayed [as monolithically white and conservative](#) — which whitewashes communities of color and ignores the historical importance of Appalachian organizers.

- The [first abolitionist newspaper](#) in the United States was started by Elihu Embree in Jonesborough, Tennessee, a small town at the foothills of the southern Appalachian Mountains.
- The [largest labor uprising](#) in US history took place in Logan County, West Virginia: the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain, when 7,500 armed miners fought against coalmine operators, strikebreakers and law enforcement in an effort to unionize the southwest West Virginia coalfields.
- Read more about Appalachian involvement in the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, the Harlan Youth Liberation Council, and the Black Appalachian

Commission: "[The Appalachian Presence in the Poor People's Campaign](#)" by Jessica Wilkerson (Rewire)

- In the 2018 book [Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia](#), Professor Karida L. Brown "offers a much-needed corrective to the current whitewashing of Appalachia... Brown offers a sweeping look at race, identity, changes in politics and policy, and black migration in the region and beyond."

Allies vs. Co-Conspirators

In this month's podcast, Deepa, Olivia and Heather discuss how white activists can move from being passive allies to becoming co-conspirators. Instead of becoming complacent, white people must organize within their own communities to educate their communities, build coalitions with people of color, and take risks for the sake of the movement. "White folks are often taught that putting our bodies on the line is the biggest risk that we can take," explains Heather, "while in actuality putting our reputation on the line is the biggest risk we can take."

- [A Year After Charlottesville, are White People Co-Conspirators in Confronting White Supremacy?](#) by Deepa Iyer (Medium)
- [Owning the Role of White Co-Conspirator](#) by Violet Rush (If/WhenHow)

Calls to Action

At the end of the podcast, Olivia and Heather share some calls to action.

- If you have the means to donate, help fund social justice work in the South and Appalachia.
 - "Get to to know your neighbors," explains Olivia." Get to know the people around you. Listen to what people's needs are when they talk, believe people when they come to you and tell you they have problems. Don't buy into these misconceptions about who Appalachia is and who lives there."
- Do your part within your community to practice liberation, connect with others and protect each other.

- Start somewhere. Take risks, make mistakes, learn and keep going.
 - Ask yourself, “am I sufficiently putting my reputation on the line?” Be willing to put your reputation on the line for the sake of the movement.
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SURJ Values

- Calling people in, not out
 - Accountability through collective action
 - Take risks, make mistakes, learn and keep going
 - Organize out of mutual interest
 - There is enough for all
 - Growing is good
 - Center class
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More Resources & Organizations

- [Dismantling Racism Workbook](#) — [Western States Center](#)
- [How to support the Black Lives Matter movement as a white ally](#) — interview with Heather Cronk by Mathew Rodriguez, Mic.com
- [Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#) by Peggy McIntosh
- [So You Want to Talk About Race](#) by Ijeoma Oluo
- [Rural Organizing Project](#) — Advancing Democracy in Rural Oregon
- [Highlander Research and Education Center](#)