



## **Ready for a Movement? Pull Up: Getting in Good Trouble**

(Session: A Guide to Getting in Good Trouble)

Koriambanya (Kori) S. Carew  
Seyfarth Shaw LLP  
233 S. Wacker Drive, Suite 8000  
Chicago, IL 60606  
(312) 460-6848  
[kcarew@seyfarth.com](mailto:kcarew@seyfarth.com)

**Kori S. Carew** generates awareness and understanding of critical human issues by creating the space and climate for open dialogue that is meaningful, enables people to expand their perspective and drives positive change. She is the Chief Inclusion & Diversity Officer at International AmLaw 100 firm Seyfarth Shaw LLP. Using advocacy and organizational strategy to address structural barriers to diversity in the workplace, Kori brings an incisive voice, unapologetic questioning of the status quo, and a lifelong fascination with human potential to empowering women and people from marginalized groups. Her TEDx is called [Just belonging: finding the courage to interrupt bias](#).

## **Introduction**

If the fear, uncertainty, anxiety and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were not enough, in May 2020 we watched the video of Ahmaud Arbery being chased and killed and learned professionals, prosecutors, declined to prosecute his killers for weeks. Then we learned how Breonna Taylor was killed in her home. And then Amy Cooper was captured on video weaponizing White (and white woman) Privilege and the stereotypes of Black men as dangerous and threatening. By the time May 25, 2020 came around and we saw a police officer kneeling on George Floyd's neck for over nine minutes as he cried for his mother and said he could not breathe, the level of racial trauma was overflowing.

What ensued since May 25, 2020, protests all over the country, cries for defunding police departments and reallocating funds to services that would better communities and reduce crime in the long run, continues today. Across the world we saw people joining in protests alongside millions of Americans desiring racial justice and equity. Our workplaces changed behavior with many companies making internal and external statements on racism and declaring commitments to anti-racism and racial equity and justice. Some companies even used the words "Black Lives Matter" in their external statements, something that would have been considered controversial three years ago. Inclusion, diversity, equity and belonging consultants and professionals are in demand right now as organizations try to ensure they are doing the right things to assess their internal culture and practices and make efforts towards anti-racism and racial equity.

In the last 16 months we also saw a rise in anti-Asian hate, discrimination and violence leading to individuals fearing for their families and selves. We have also seen a recent spike in anti-Semitism as well as Islamophobia. **Leaders across this country understand that engaging in anti-racism, racial justice and equity, anti-Islamophobia, anti-anti-Semitism efforts, and working against all forms of hate and bigotry in the workplace is not just consistent with their diversity and inclusion values, but necessary.**

A question asked by colleagues, attendees at conferences I speak at, and in one-on-one conversations is simple. They ask, "is this a moment or a movement?" I don't know if this is a movement. I am hopeful we are in a movement. It may, however, be a moment unless we choose to make it a movement. People more often ask, "what can I do?" because they do not want to merely be observers but participants in change. Let's make it a movement. This moment in time offers us a pivotal opportunity to evaluate how we approach facts, truth and history and show that we each have a role to play. To make sure we have a sustainable movement we must "pull up" like the young folks say.

## **Sustaining a Movement in Our Organizations for True Change**

Here are seven steps to make sure this moment is a movement and we do the actual work of anti-racism and racial equity in our organizations:

## 1. **Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil**

Every once in a while that Christian charismatic upbringing of mine kicks in. This is one of those times. In order to solve a problem we must face that problem and we must tell the truth. **To solve a problem we must understand it, and to understand it we must resist denial, see and speak the truth.** Acknowledge the reality and truth of racism in America. Acknowledge the truth of systemic racism, institutional racism and interpersonal racism. Acknowledge discrimination and bias in banking and lending, housing, education, access to health care, policing, the criminal justice system and other areas of our society. Acknowledge your organization's history, gaps and plans toward anti-racism and racial justice and equity.

In 2019, Nikole Hannah-Jones and the *New York Times Magazine* released the 1619 Project. [The 1619 Project](#) seeks to tell the story of America often left out of history books and highlight the complete narrative of American history to include slavery and race in America up to the present around anti-Black racism. While the 1619 Project received glowing [reviews and feedback](#), we have since seen organized and concerted attacks on the project and its lead reporter (Adam Serwer, The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About Facts (*The Atlantic*, December 23, 2019). The project is being used in some schools for teaching and in many organizations to facilitate meaningful discussions. Critics of the project (and efforts to expand our understanding of history to include facts predominantly left out of cultural discourse and formal education) argue that the project and attempts to expand education curriculum and discourse *is* racist in and of itself. These current debates are happening in school boards, in communities, and online. One can only come to the conclusion that engaging in delving into the full truth of our history is racist if the premise is that our telling of history has been, up until now, complete and accurate and told with a neutral lens as opposed to a heterosexual cisgender able-bodied white male lens. It also only works if you re-define what racism means and how it works (see below for further discussion to understand what racism is).

## 2. **Knowledge Is Power**

Knowledge is power, but only when we turn that knowledge into wisdom and apply it. Education and awareness programs have received a lot of criticism in recent years with some even arguing that implicit bias trainings do not work. **Education and learning are necessary components of growth.** Understanding cultural differences, the history of race and racism, the ways in which racism shows up in systems and cultures are all necessary components of change. This is not the whole solution, but is a component of the solution. The beautiful thing about learning is that we have tremendous access to reliable information and can learn at our own pace. Feel free to check out this [resource and toolkit](#) put together by me and my

colleagues. Engage in meaningful conversations and [know the do's and don'ts](#). In addition, [The Belonging Project](#), a national collaboration between bar associations, consultants, law schools, law departments and law firms to support law students and lawyers from underrepresented groups offers a plethora of resources including webinars that can be attended virtually live for free. You can also access the webinars for free on on-demand.

### 3. **Words Matter and Definitions Are Important**

We understand each other when words have the same meaning and we speak the same language. Yet one of the words frequently mis-used and mis-applied is “racism.” We currently live in a time where a discussion of race or pointing out race as a factor in current events or personal experience opens you up to being accused of being racist. Responses to discussions of racism elicit defenses such as “he is not a bad person,” “he is married to a Black woman,” or some other defense that has nothing to do with what being racist is or understanding how racism functions. **Fact: Good people can do racist things. Also, fact: Well-meaning people can and do engage in racist behavior.** Why is this true? Because racism in America has a systemic element that flows through our culture and institutions leading to behaviors that may seem benign to us but are problematic. Similarly, White Privilege is received in some quarters as meaning white people do not work hard for what they have or have suffered no individual setbacks. This is far from what White Privilege is about. If your organization is going to engage in anti-racism and racial equity a common understanding of terms and language must be used. Educate around what terms mean and why they are important.

Below are some words that demand proper definition (and consistent use) from us because when used improperly do not lead to progress but rather hold us back from achieving equity, belonging and inclusion.

- **White Privilege:**

“Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#)

- **White Supremacy:**

“The idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. While most people associate white supremacy with extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the neo-Nazis, white supremacy is ever present in our

institutional and cultural assumptions that assign value, morality, goodness, and humanity to the white group while casting people and communities of color as worthless (worth less), immoral, bad, and inhuman and “undeserving.”” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Racism:**

Racism = race prejudice + social and institutional power

Racism = a system of advantage based on race

Racism = a system of oppression based on race

Racism = a white supremacy system

Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Institutional Racism:**

“Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Cultural Racism:**

“Cultural racism refers to representations, messages and stories conveying the idea that behaviors and values associated with white people or “whiteness” are automatically “better” or more “normal” than those associated with other racially defined groups. Cultural racism shows up in advertising, movies, history books, definitions of patriotism, and in policies and laws.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Interpersonal Racism:**

“Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. Once we bring our private beliefs into our interaction with others, racism is now in the interpersonal realm.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Individual Racism:**

“Individual racism refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can be deliberate, **or the individual may act to perpetuate or support racism without knowing that is what [they] [[are] doing.**” (Emphasis added) Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Anti-Racism:**

“Anti-Racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism tends to be an individualized approach, and set up in opposition to individual racist behaviors and impacts.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Intersectionality:**

“It’s basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.” Kimberlé Crenshaw quoted in, “She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to Her Today,” by Katy Steinmetz, (Time.com, February 20, 2020).

“Exposing [one’s] multiple identities can help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Microaggressions:**

“The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.” Racial Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **Implicit Bias:**

“Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals’ attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to

trump individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess." Race Equity Tools, [Glossary](#).

- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

#### 4. **Practice, Practice, Practice**

Like everything, practice makes perfect. Except, with anti-racism and moving the needle on racial justice and equity we ought to strive for always practicing as we will always be learning. We will not always get it right. We will make mistakes. We will use the wrong words. Despite our well-meaning we will not always be well-doing, and we may be told something we said or did was offensive and it will sting. Being anti-racist and part of a movement requires a commitment to keep going. **Learn from your mistakes, get comfortable being uncomfortable, and keep moving forward.** Develop a personal plan as you continue to learn, pick a behavior you want to change, translate the behavior into habits and tasks and practice.

#### 5. **The System Is Not Broken but It Must Be Dismantled**

You are more likely to achieve your goals if you assess your habits and behaviors, and leverage your habits to create new routines. Understanding your cues and responses will help you succeed. Why then do we so often think we can improve diversity in the workplace by having education sessions and sending people on their way? Systems and processes are to organizations as habits are to people. Good intentions and plans can be sabotaged by bad habits and learned behaviors. Systems and processes that hide blind spots and inequity sabotage well-intentioned diversity and anti-racism commitments.

**Racism in America is more than just implicit bias, learned habits and people in white hoods.** Understanding systemic racism helps us understand how racial inequity occurs in our organizations and institutions based on how they were created, the normative lenses used to filter value add, talent, behavior and all aspects of human engagement. A movement will require us to understand the systems in our organizations, how they hide bias, how they ignore cultural differences, where racism is built into the system and then make changes. Our systems were built to work for some of us. Now let's make them work equitably for all.

"You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems." James Clear in *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*. This is true not just for individual habits and goals but for organizational systems and values.

#### 6. **Execute**

Understanding racism, anti-racism, and cultivating diversity and inclusion in our organizations requires expertise. Bring in experts, spend the money to hire people who know what they are doing, and then execute. **Executing on organizational change requires leadership from the top and ownership for execution across the organization.** Numerous articles have been written recently on why Chief Diversity Officers are often [set up to fail](#). Avoid these pitfalls by ensuring those leading your anti-racism efforts have the resources—human and financial, authority and support needed to succeed. Good DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) professionals **offer exceptional value which is only useful if listened to and executed upon.**

**Inclusion Drivers:** I utilize four inclusion change drivers in my work that also work for anti-racism work within your organizations. Use these drivers when creating solutions, initiatives and programs and also when evaluating the efficacy of your programs. The four drivers are:

- Leadership: Leaders set the tone for culture. When an organization states values and its behaviors do not align with the values, leaders must begin to model new behaviors for the culture shift desired. Conduct an internal analysis of whether your leaders are committed to the equity statements, ask if the leaders understand what is at stake, do they attend programs, do they integrate strategies and solutions into their own behavior from leading meetings to team management and decision making?
- Communication & Involvement: Ensure you frequently and consistently communicate the values of inclusion, equity and belonging (in this case anti-racism), make sure commitments, goals and progress are accessible to those within your organization, and ensure all are encouraged to participate with emphasis on leaders showing up and being actively present.
- Education and Training: While diversity training has faced much criticism in recent years, **diversity training does work** when combined with implementation and when translated to actionable behaviors and tasks that others can implement. Invest in excellent, relevant and targeted education and awareness in order to equip individuals to engage in the behaviors that are needed for the organizational culture to shift and yield the results needed.
- Measurement and Accountability: What gets measured gets done. That is a popular saying we all have heard. Like all business strategies and all goals and targets, commitments



and initiatives to support our inclusion, diversity and anti-racism values and goals must be measured. It is important to measure the correct things and understand the lead and lagging indicators. In addition, if values are truly important to an organization, then the culture reflects it by what is celebrated and rewarded and what is discouraged and penalized. Accountability is essential for progress.

### **Strategic Plans and Approaches:**

At Seyfarth (and also when I led Inclusion and Diversity initiatives at Shook Hardy & Bacon), I utilize strategic approaches, instead of a lengthy strategic plan, that have four core pillars. Shook did have a detailed strategic plan that aligned not just the overall firm diversity and inclusion strategy, but the roles of all departments within the firm in advancing diversity and inclusion and how those departments would overlap and intersect with each other including the Diversity and Inclusion department. I then used a strategic approach and action plans. The decision on whether to use a strategic plan or a strategic approach is personal to the organization after considering various factors including culture.

Regardless of whether you use a strategy plan or approach, organizations **must** have a strategy that is explicit, understood, communicated widely across the organization, integrated into decision making, and communicated often. A simple thing like including the core pillars of your strategic approach and then the action plan goals on meeting agendas serves as an effective reminder to keep all on track and focused in the same direction. The organization must also have a plan that outlines how goals and the strategy will be implemented, or core pillars of the strategic approach around which decisions must be made and how the action plan integrates with strategy. In essence, departments, leaders and employees need to know the strategy, understand the values driving the strategy, understand how their work and behavior intersects with the overall strategy, and know how their behavior and actions must be aligned with the strategic approach or plan.

### **7. Choose Courage**

Over the years I have come to see courage as doing the thing you know needs to be done but you don't want to do. The process of being part of change around diversity and choosing anti-racism in this moment requires courage. Many are being attacked right now as fomenting division. Some of our colleagues are vehemently opposed to the commitment of anti-racism and the education, town halls, listening tours and other efforts organizations are engaging in. In 2020 into 2021 President Donald Trump declared cultural sensitivity training and addressing topics such as white privilege as un-American and divisive and banned [such training for federal employees](#).

He is wrong. Nelson Mandela talked of courage as not being fearless but rather walking through fear. Courage is needed now more than ever as those who stand for anti-racism are likely to face more opposition. This [TEDx talk](#) walks you through five necessary steps for choosing courage to disrupt -isms and bias. Those steps are:

- Listening Differently (with Empathy)
- Cultivating Curiosity
- Negotiating with Vulnerability
- Stand Up, Speak Up
- Redefine Belonging

## **Conclusion**

We can choose to maintain a movement for change, for anti-racism, for racial equity and justice in our organizations and in our communities. It is not easy work. It will require learning and un-learning. We must be willing to be vulnerable and engage in emotional agility as we process new knowledge and what it means for what we have always known, who we are, and how we want to show up in the world. Perhaps if we start with the understanding that how we show up as humans, our ability to develop cultural fluency, which is necessary to be excellent lawyers in a diverse world, we can embrace how important it is for us to address social justice issues including anti-racism to be better lawyers and leaders. **As Brené Brown reminds us, “when we deny the story, it owns us. When we own the story, we can write a new ending.”** May we choose to face our story of racism and its roots and write a new story together.

\*All views in this written material are the views of the author and not attributable to any organization she is affiliated with.

\*\*Portions of this paper previously appear in an [article](#) printed on LinkedIn by the Executive Inclusion Institute thought leadership series.

Resources:

1. Article: Adam Serwer, [The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About Facts](#) (*The Atlantic*, December 23, 2021).
2. Video: Just Belonging: Finding the Courage to Interrupt Bias, Kori S. Carew (TEDx).
3. Magazine edition: [The 1619 Project](#) (*New York Times Magazine*)
4. Podcast: 1619
5. Podcast: Unlocking Us by Brené Brown
6. Podcast: Dare to Lead with Brené Brown
7. Webpage: [Seyfarth's Anti-Racism and Allyship Toolkit](#)
8. Webpage: [The Belonging Project](#) (includes articles, videos, CLEs and webinars)
9. Webpage: [Racial Equity Tools](#)
10. Derald Wing Sue, PhD, "Microaggressions: More than Just Race" (*Psychology Today*, 17 November 2010).
11. Book: *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown
12. Book: *Dare to Lead*, Brené Brown
13. Book: *The Color of Law*, Richard Rothstein
14. Book: *Caste*, Isabel Wilkerson
15. Book: *How to Be Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi