



## Podcast: Getting Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable

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Civic Entertainment Group Chief Culture Officer Linda Ong addresses the current cultural moment and getting comfortable with being uncomfortable in the below essay originally posted on Medium.com:

First of all, let me say: I am not Black.

I do not presume to speak for Black people, who I assume do not presume to speak for each other.

I am a non-Black, non-white person who's lived with both discrimination and privilege.

As a cultural strategist, I am in the business of empathy. Of deeply listening - then translating. I help brands understand the lives and experiences of "others." My clients are mostly content creators and streaming platforms who want to be "culturally relevant," i.e., more accurately speak to, reflect and represent different cultures and subcultures through media. And then monetize it by selling advertising or subscriptions to some, all or sometimes none of them.

And by "others," I mean Black people. I also mean Latinx and Asians, but I also

mean the LGBTQ+ community, Gen Z, moms, soccer fans, gamers and Miami residents. People who are different from a white, male, heterosexual, Boomer Christian norm. People like me.

In culture today, difference is table stakes. What makes us different keeps us human.

The death of George Floyd struck so many Americans so deeply, at a time of so much collective vulnerability, because we simply could not fathom the inhumanity. And we understood exactly why it was happening.

This week, my team and I have become crisis managers to our clients. Imagine feeling you've been AirDrop-ped into a sea of COVID-19, trying to pluck people from a burning Titanic. (Yes, that's an ugly but intentionally mixed metaphor. That's where we are right now.)

But in speaking with a few white friends, colleagues and loved ones, I saw they craved guidance in reaching out to people in the Black community as well. Some actions and words, while well-intentioned, were not having their intended effect. Some felt "white guilt." For others, a deep sense of shame. But all were confused - they considered themselves good, progressive albeit relatively privileged people before this happened. In the last week, it was revealed they'd been complicit in - and benefited from- a very flawed system. In which they were the bad guys.

The current crisis has laid bare the weaknesses of (white) liberalism.

Systemic reform starts with individual action. So, I thought it would be helpful to share a few "Dear White People" observations:

Don't think all Black people feel the same way. Everyone is processing this moment in highly personal ways. Some will appreciate your well-meaning text and some might find it an intrusion. Or some might just need a moment. Let them dictate the terms. Consider a note like: "I'm thinking of you and would love to hear how you're doing, whenever you feel like talking."

Don't single out a Black person to speak for the entire community. That's an enormous pressure most people wouldn't want. Try, "What are you hearing?"

Don't mistake advocacy for activism. Posting a black square and #BlackLivesMatter ended up being more controversial than anyone anticipated, shining a bright light on "slacktivism." Voicing your support is table stakes. Today, the bar is higher for people to put effort into action. What are you willing to put on the line?

Don't be self-serving. Don't confess your "white guilt" sins as a means of absolution - that's what spiritual leaders and therapists are for. If you don't know what to say, a simple "I hope you're OK" will do for a person of any color or

orientation. Or even an organization.

Don't think you can't learn. Think of cultural re-education as self-care. Talk to people. Read a book. Read several books (or listen to them, or podcasts, or the top tracks on Spotify). Follow Black thought leaders online. Watch any Spike Lee movie. Look up the myriad of resources from organizations.

You can't have your Marie Antoinette cake and eat it too.

Bottom line: You can't be for change and not want to change yourself right now. Hopefully, this is not the last word, but an invitation for you to add to the conversation, and call me out if I'm out of turn. I'll keep listening.

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