



GUILFORD EDUCATION ALLIANCE



Lift Every Voice: Sherry Wyche

Our "Lift Every Voice" series amplifies the voices of individuals in our alliance that have perspectives that we need to hear. Living into the "Alliance" part of our name, GEA has embraced a "big tent", "one voice", "unity" approach to our communications. That has value. It can also cause us to minimize or miss individual voices, especially as they challenge us to talk about and consider racism in America through their lived experience. This edition's contributor is Sherry Wyche, a project manager for American Reading Company.

Over the years, she has served as a teacher, data manager, recruiter, and program specialist. She is an active member of GEA's Program Leadership Team. In my opinion, any meeting is better with Sherry in it. She brings enthusiasm, creativity and energy to any task or challenge. She contributes. She listens. Her dynamism is contagious. In her words below, she shares some of what fuels her as a powerful force for change, for good. Sherry lives with her wife and three dogs in Greensboro. She enjoys projects on their 1950s fixer upper, gardening, and -- thankfully -- volunteering with GEA.

-- *Winston*

Being Black in America

By: Sherry Wyche

It's hard to unpack what it is like to be Black in America - even while being Black in America.

It's not as simple as saying "What would you feel like if you were in my shoes?" It's a hard shift for a non-black person to see life through a black person's eyes. It's impossible for a white person to empathize with something that they were born privileged from.

The year 2020 has exemplified the unfortunate reality that Black America is faced with every day.

I put a "Black Lives Matter Here" sign in my yard. It was stolen only a few days later. Immediately, I felt unsafe in my own home.

I've been wearing a mask in public for months, as everyone should, but I still can't get comfortable with it. I'm not uncomfortable with wearing a mask because it's September in the South. I'm uncomfortable with it because I need for white people in public to know that I am friendly and am not a threat to them. Can they tell I'm smiling?

A branch of my wife's family tree disowned her because of the color of my skin. They've never met me, shaken my hand, or had a conversation with me.

Being Black feels like your position in life is unpredictable. It feels like being misunderstood on purpose. Being Black is never fully feeling safe.

White privilege cannot end until it is acknowledged and "spent" for good. Racism cannot be remedied until education takes its place. I don't have all of the answers, but I have created a short list of things I want my white friends to know.

5 Things I want my white friends to know

1. Reading a book, an article, or liking a tweet doesn't make you an ally. Making space for people of color when they aren't in the room is when it really counts.

It is easy to sit behind a computer or phone screen and say, "I'm with you, I see you." It's easy to share a Pinterest-worthy quote on your timeline. It's easy to put a sign in your yard that reads "Black Lives Matter." **But friends, what are you actually doing?** What action steps are you taking? What conversations are you having? Where are your donation dollars going? Being an ally for Black people is hard work.

2. I don't get to come home and take off my blackness at the end of the day.

White people rarely have to think about being white. **My home is the one place where my Black doesn't have to be protected.** Re-read that if you need to. When I am in public, my blackness is a stamp on my forehead. My blackness isn't

a secret, but it feels like something that everyone is whispering about. Feeling this way instinctively puts me on guard. Imagine waking up every morning to put on a cape of blackness. This cape is heavy and I'm tired, but I'm still proud of it.

3. If you see something, say something.

Have you been witness to racism in action? Use your privilege to advocate for Black people. Have you overheard microaggressions and you've been letting them slide? Speak up. **If you really believe that Black lives matter, use your voice.**

4. Can we all agree that white people should stop saying "I don't see color"?!

I know you see color. It's okay. **I want you to see that I am Black and celebrate it.** My Black is beautiful and so multi-faceted. The notion of "not seeing color" or being "colorblind" is so damaging and hurtful. Let's move past it.

5. Every single Black person has racial trauma that they don't speak on.

Black families have a backlog of racial trauma; memoirs worth of stories. We don't want to talk about them. Just take our word for it. The look of disappointment when we show up to a job interview and they realize we're black. Gritting our teeth through microaggressions about our hair texture, our skin tone, how we speak. Getting pulled over for a speeding ticket does not always end with Black people getting home safely. Sleeping soundly in our own homes doesn't even mean the police won't barge in with guns blazing these days. **The takeaway here is that, even if I haven't shared my gruesome racist stories with you, they've happened.**

If you are interested in learning more about being Black in America read/listen to the following books/podcasts:

1. [Dear Martin](#) by Nic Stone
2. [Locking Up Our Own](#) by James Forman Jr.
3. [How to Be An Antiracist](#) by Ibram X. Kendi
4. Silence is Not an Option with Don Lemon (podcast)
5. 1619 (Podcast)

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