

Self Care in the Multiracial Movement for Black Lives

There are many ways that leaders keep going in the face of work that can be traumatic.

JENNIFER L. POZNER | SEP 21, 2016 7:31PM ET



Members of the Facing Race session on 'Multiracial Movements For Black Lives.' Illustration Credit: Erin Zipper/Race Forward

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare,” Audre Lorde famously wrote in *A Burst of Light*. Yet, it can seem as though there’s never any “right time to rest” when you’re working to ensure that Black lives matter.

In November, hundreds of racial justice organizers, artists, scholars, advocates and journalists will gather in Atlanta at Facing Race, the eighth national conference organized by Colorlines’ publisher, Race Forward. Together, they’ll learn lessons of resistance and strategies for transformation from leaders of the [Multiracial Movements for Black Lives](#). Here, in advance of that activist masterclass, leaders from #AsiansForBlackLives, Black Lives Matter, Familia, and more share how they keep going even in the face of work that can be traumatic.

“What is the number one thing that I am doing for self-care?” asks

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self-care. It is a way for me to practice the importance of community and of collective care that is integral to what makes it possible for me to live to fight another day.”

What we need to live to fight another day can be different for each of us. For some, like [Isa Noyola](#), director of programs for the Transgender Law Center, that sustenance comes in the form of joyous movement, music, and connection. “Queer Cumbia, a monthly dance party in the Bay Area (offers) my favorite self-care moments,” says Noyola, also a national advocate for *El/La Para TransLatinas*. “Dancing to techno cumbia beats gives me oodles of life!”

For others, like author [Chris Crass](#), author of *Towards the “Other America”: Anti-Racist Resources for White People Taking Action for Black Lives Matter*, the act of living another day can itself be a struggle. “In doing this work, I’ve struggled with depression, anxiety, loss of morale, even suicidal urges,” Crass acknowledges. “For me, self-care is spiritual warfare to reclaim our hearts, minds, souls, bodies, relationships, and communities from the devastating feelings fostered by supremacy systems, and internalized in many of us, that tell us we are worthless, wrong, and that everything we are doing for justice will fundamentally fail.” In response to those external and internal pressures, Crass’s self-preservation toolkit “includes prayer, playing with my kids, loving my partner and my community, reading or watching superhero movies,” and “most importantly, it is a spiritual practice that affirms my worth, the gorgeousness of our messy movement, and the recognition of our people’s victories throughout history.”

Another social justice hero to many, [Michelle Alexander](#), author of *The New Jim Crow*, and the moderator of the Facing Race “Multiracial Movements for Black Lives” plenary, knows that she — like so many of us — doesn’t prioritize her own needs as much as would be ideal. “I can’t pretend that self-care is a strength of mine,” Alexander admits, “but I know that I’d be able to give more if I paused more, relaxed more, slept more, and took time for the things and people that bring me joy. I’m an introvert by nature so the one thing that restores me most is simply having time alone. Running early in the morning, especially in the beautiful natural settings like the woods or near the ocean, is absolutely my favorite thing, along with yoga and journaling — practices that I’m struggling to make routine.”

Our movements need to find ways to take care of each other when we are willing but unable [care for ourselves](#) in the ways that

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Constantinides. Dr. Constantinides, a licensed clinical social worker, created the database “to connect local activists with therapists who support the movement for Black lives.”

The Healing for Activists database is an example of clinicians using their privilege to care for those who would not be able to access therapy. In doing so, they are enacting a mandate similar to the vision of self-care held by Facing Race panelist and Native Organizers Alliance director [Judith LeBlanc](#). “For me, self-care is only understandable within the circle of building community, and caring for our collective future.” That vision is put into practice at the Oceti Sakowin Camp, where Native organizers are working to prevent the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#) from destroying water sources and sacred land. There, Le Blanc says, “self care is intertwined with the well being of Mother Earth. Over 4,000 people, Native elders, babies, traditional and tribal government leaders have come to take a stand for the well being of all who live along the Missouri River. The everyday rituals of camp life are threaded together by the need to insure that all have food to eat, water, warm clothing, and spiritual sustenance.”

At Facing Race, leaders from racial, gender, economic, reproductive, LGBTQ, environmental justice, immigrants’ rights, and all corners our movements will be sharing wisdom from the field and strategizing how we can work together for public policies that truly care for every one of us. We cannot show up for racial justice effectively for years to come if our candles have burned down to just a wick.

Take Alicia Garza’s word for it: “If we are going to forge a strong movement for social transformation, no community can do that on its own. A strong movement can only be built with the active participation of all of us, connected in our resistance to anti-Blackness and the systems that keep our communities divided. Join us to explore the challenges and opportunities emerge as we commit to forging a new way forward—together.”

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