

# A Playbook for Black Austin Activism





## **Dear Community,**

It has been exactly one year since the world witnessed the murder of George Floyd. Rightly so, protests, statements, and movements to end police brutality have continued. Approximately 180 Black people have died at the hands of police since May 2020.

So, what is it going to take to change the brutal forces that exist in a culture that makes my life less valuable because of the color of my skin?

The simple answer is that it takes all of us. And that is where the hard work begins. We call it "allyship" or "being a co-conspirator".

This Playbook for Black Activism takes a look at allyship from the lens of different lived experiences — specifically what it means to be Black and an ally to others. May is also Mental Health Awareness Month and I know the emotional toll of being Black in America — so we have provided resources for you to consider.

It is my hope you can use this Playbook as a tool to learn more about equity and do the work required to create peace and beauty on the planet.

**With love and gratitude,**

*Shuronda Robinson*

# Team Adisa Speaks: Are you an ally or co-conspirator?

*What is the difference between the two?*

As we develop practices to take better care of ourselves, we must also focus on taking care of each other. **Anti-racist work cannot be done alone, and we encourage you to think about the role you're playing in supporting others.** We polled Team Adisa on their definitions of ally and co-conspirator. We also took it a step further by identifying which of the two we most align with and where we would like to position ourselves moving forward.



**Shuronda**  
*She/Her*

## **What is your definition of an ally?**

Someone who, within the context in which we are operating, has a higher level of privilege or power and is willing to extend it to serve the people at the margins.

## **What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

An individual who is willing to work side-by-side with the marginalized to secure equity, regardless of their power or privilege.

## **Where do you stand?**

As a Black woman and leader in my organization, there are many times that I serve as an ally to lift the voice and recognition of those who are at the margins. I am an activist at heart and the role of strategy and bringing people in to shift power is always my work.

## **Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

I am working on being more reflective about how I can serve my community. At this stage in my career, my focus is on legacy work.



**Tyler**  
*He/Him*

**What is your definition of an ally?**

An ally stands for or speaks out for the rights and freedoms of a person experiencing inequality or injustice concerning their status as a part of a protected category.

**What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

A co-conspirator is an ally who is willing to place themselves side-by-side with someone experiencing injustice or discrimination. This means acting instead of just taking a side or stance.

**Where do you stand?**

I would align myself with co-conspirators, as I know from experience that words are not enough to turn into actions and legislation.

**Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

I would stay as a co-conspirator.







**Naiya**  
*She/Her*

**What is your definition of an ally?**

An ally is not just a friend, but someone that aligns with and supports a cause with another individual or group of people.

**What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

To be a co-conspirator means that one commits to acting against racism regardless of the consequences and uses their own privilege to battle racism and other causes that contribute to the discrimination of an individual or group of people.

**Where do you stand?**

I stand with the forgotten, the underprivileged, and those who are voiceless in the face of authoritative powers.

**Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

I want to position myself to be the voice of those who need support in finding theirs, be open to all causes and efforts in the fight against racism and inequality, and use my own privilege to stand up for those who are not given the chance to stand up for themselves.



**Jen**  
*She/Her/Ella*

**What is your definition of an ally?**

An ally is someone who aligns themselves in support of a cause, even if they are not someone who is experiencing being marginalized.

**What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

A co-conspirator is a more active version of an ally. They are someone who gets in the trenches and is willing to be an active participant in the fight of injustice.

**Where do you stand?**

I would like to consider myself a co-conspirator, but there is so much more room to grow and be a stronger advocate for others.

**Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

I recognize that I have privileges others do not and rather than stay silent, I would like to weaponize these privileges to amplify others. I would like to position myself to be a megaphone for the voices of those who go unheard.



**Julie**  
*She/Her*

**What is your definition of an ally?**

I think of an ally as someone who leads from the back of the room. Someone who is always present but often quiet; ready to support, guide, and cheer others on.

**What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

I imagine a co-conspirator leading from the front of the room, ready to take the mic and lead the charge if needed. Someone who uses their voice and their actions to co-create and lead anti-racist work.

**Where do you stand?**

My natural style is much more that of an ally.

**Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

I'm on a journey driven by the desire to move from ally to co-conspirator. As a white woman, I'm learning when and how to use my voice without centering myself. I want to continue listening, learning, and giving voice to those who are not often heard.



**Lakeisha**  
*She/Her*

**What is your definition of an ally?**

To me, being an ally translates to offering support. A listening ear, offering compassion, and in some cases helping with resources. Allyship feels more like moral support rather than taking firm action.

**What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

In my mind's eye, a co-conspirator takes firm, clear action and is most often found on the front lines. Co-conspirators are not afraid to put themselves at risk to fight for what they believe.

**Where do you stand?**

In all honesty, I see myself as an ally.

**Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

This exercise personally taught me so much about the difference between the two. Going forward I plan to continue being an ally while adding co-conspirator-inspired action to support those who need it most.



# **Dorcaus**

*She/Her/Hers*

**What is your definition of an ally?**

I consider an ally to be a friend.

**What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

I believe a co-conspirator is someone who has the knowledge to assist in planning with another person.

**Where do you stand?**

I am currently evaluating my position, but open to learning more about both sides before taking a firm stance.

**Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

This will depend on what I learn as I raise my awareness around the two terms. I like to make informed decisions.



# Karmella

*She/Her*

## **What is your definition of an ally?**

My definition of an ally is an accomplice. At this point, we do not need more allies, we need accomplices, willing to unlearn the harmful ways of our society and participate in transforming our world into the peace and beauty we want to see on this planet.

## **What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

I believe a co-conspirator can mean or represent a variety of things, but I think the definition for me is someone that can look at a situation from all lenses and perspectives and work to find solutions, even if they are unconventional. A co-conspirator relies on the collaboration of team effort in order to meet an agenda.

## **Where do you stand?**

I stand with allies and co-conspirators. I think we need both to bring forth a new world.

## **Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

I would like to position myself as a resource and a sounding board. I want others to view me as honest in my critical analysis and always open to new learning experiences.





# Rah

## She/Her/Hers

### **What is your definition of an ally?**

An Ally is a loyal and empathetic partner that aligns with and voices support for a cause standing alongside another individual or group of people.

### **What is your definition of a co-conspirator?**

A co-conspirator is an ally that stands in solidarity and works intentionally with people and movements to affect and achieve change. They use their privilege to help amplify the voices of people and causes they support.

### **Where do you stand?**

I am a co-conspirator for anti-racism, social justice, and women's and educational equality.

### **Where would you like to position yourself in terms of supporting others moving forward?**

I would like to position myself as caring, curious, and empathic in supporting others moving forward.

*To learn more about the definitions of an ally or co-conspirator, we encourage you to check out Racial Equity Tools' Glossary of Terms at [www.racialequitytools.org/glossary](http://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary).*

# May 2021

## Mental Health Awareness Month

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. In the midst of an ongoing global pandemic, and as we reflect on the murder of George Floyd, it is important to recognize the impact that loss and grief have on our mental health. The past year has been full of loss and hardship. Many have experienced job loss, health issues, the loss of loved ones, homelessness, neglect, and abuse.

The lack of foundational support and meaningful social interactions have created a major shift in the way we think and live. When you view these issues alongside social injustices experienced and witnessed throughout communities each day, undoubtedly, there is cause for major concern. Especially for Black people.

Our team is big on self-care and awareness. We asked **Chris Isom, owner of EveryBODY Studios** in East Austin, to share tips for enhancing our mental well-being.

"In various communities of color, acknowledging and honoring your mental health can be considered taboo. It's time to shift that way of thinking and understand that true healing comes from within. Also, utilizing our breath and movement help create holistic well-being along with a sound mind, body, and spirit."

### Chris Isom

is a former professional basketball player, youth facilitator, and currently a holistic health coach, certified personal trainer.

http://

[www.everybodystudiosatx.com](http://www.everybodystudiosatx.com)



[@everybodystudios.atx](https://www.instagram.com/everybodystudios.atx)



# Chris's Tips for Mental Health

## Keep an Eye on Your Mental and Overall Health

Ask yourself the following questions:

*How does my head feel today?*

*How does my heart feel today?*

*How is my body?*

This technique is often referred to as a body scan – a mindfulness practice. After you've checked in with your body, mind, and spirit, send love and light to any areas you may be experiencing negative emotions or carrying tension. Honor those feelings and release them by breathing deeply.

## Find a Therapist

Therapy is important and should be at the forefront of all the modalities for healing. Therapy is not exclusive to those who have mental health issues. We all deal with some level of stress, which causes us to trap and store energy in our bodies. Talking thoughts through with a mental health professional can offer healing. If you're not ready to sign up for therapy just yet, try talking to a trusted friend to release negative feelings – but be sure to return the favor. We all need love and support.

## Try Yoga or Other Mindfulness and Movement Practices

Get into yoga or any other mindfulness and movement practice. These practices allow us to sit with ourselves, slow down, and analyze what's happening at a deeper level. In today's world, we're always moving and tend to wear that as a badge of honor. It's cool to be on the go. It's great to push through. However, in the addition to that, we must be able to slow down, take breaks, and tap into our own physical body," Chris says.

## Chris also wants you to know:

- **It's OK to acknowledge who you are and where you are.**
- **It's OK to do yoga.**
- **It's necessary to breathe.**

He also recommends adding exercise and nutritious foods to daily routines.

# Mental Health Resources for the Black Community

Culturally, mental health is something that is highly stigmatized in communities of color. We want to reiterate that 1) It is okay to have feelings and be human and 2) there is nothing wrong with seeking help. Here are some local community resources to start with.

## The Austin Center for Grief and Loss

Scott Van Camp

<https://www.austingrief.org/our-therapists>



## 4ABHN - Austin Area African American Behavioral Health Network

<https://hogg.utexas.edu/events-networks/4abhn>



## EveryBODY Studios

[www.everybodystudiosatx.com](http://www.everybodystudiosatx.com)



## Hearts2Heal

Maria Brown-Spence

<https://www.hearts2heal.org>



## No More, No Mas

Support for family violence, substance abuse and sexual assault

<https://www.nomorenomas.org/>



# *In Our Own Voices*

**We see the ideas of being an ally and co-conspirators as an act of service to humanity and each other as people. Earlier in the Playbook, we heard from the Adisa Communications team. We also asked BIPOC community members to share what it means to have an ally.**

Because service is truly an art, it can be delivered in many shapes and forms. Whatever has been placed in your heart, planted in your mind, or embedded in your being – do that with an open mind, heart, and desire to be of service to others.

Let's examine ways in which we can support various communities locally.

## **Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Community**

May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. In light of recent hate crimes against the AAPI community, we want to encourage Black Austin to learn more about their plight and find ways to support our brothers and sister who belong to this community.

- Check-in with Your AAPI Friends, Family, Colleagues, and Community Members
- Learn to be a Better Bystander
- Amplify Content About Anti-AAPI Racism and Discrimination
- Advocate and Get Politically Active
- Learn About the History of Anti-AAPI Racism
- Support AAPI-owned businesses or organizations that help the community. Visit [www.austinasianchamber.org/list](http://www.austinasianchamber.org/list) to see a list of AAPI-owned businesses and organizations in Austin.



We also asked Emlyn Lee with BRAVE Communities in Austin, to share ways we can take action to support the AAPI community locally.



"I have to be a co-conspirator in order to be an ally."

**Emlyn Lee, BRAVE Communities**

"Include us in the conversation, especially when talking about racial and social justice issues. It is often a Black or white perspective and Asians are often left out. I cannot pinpoint if it's societal norms with the model minority myth and the stereotypes of Asians are submissive, quiet, and they are disruptive...but whatever it is, don't. That's feeding into white supremacy.

Act by inviting us to the seat of the table. Encourage us to share our stories and be patient, because it's been so normalized to keep us quiet that we are still processing and unpacking our stories--along with the rest of our communities. It's a journey that we all need to take together to enjoy this adventure."

You can also learn more about the importance of voting, volunteering, and giving to the AAPI community by visiting [www.apapa.org/chapters/austin-texas/](http://www.apapa.org/chapters/austin-texas/).



# Native American Community

We asked Laura how others can be allies for the Native American community and act. Here's what she shared.

"Every day in this country there is a challenge to somebody's right to live, to walk down the street, to be who they are without harassment, threats, or violence. We are now being challenged to protect our history; now more than ever we must tell the stories of what has happened in this State to Black and Brown people. Being an ally means committing for your lifetime to learn as much as you can about the histories of communities of color, incorporating anti-racist work into your everyday actions, and visualizing what a better world might look like for your descendants.

We have not disappeared. As an indigenous Tejana, I live on the land of my ancestors, and I want this heritage to be recognized at your meetings and your gatherings. I want the land itself to be respected and cared for. And I hope that through community education we can learn more about the histories of Black and Brown people that happened on this land. Only then can we create true understanding, peace, and opportunity for us all."

"As someone who is proud of her Coahuiltecan heritage, I want for all Native communities to be recognized and valued as vibrant members of our society."

**Laura  
she/her  
Museums and Cultural  
Program Division  
Manager, City of Austin  
Parks and Recreation  
Department**

## **Learn. Donate. Participate.**

- The Annual Austin Powwow is a social gathering where many Native American communities come together for one of the largest one-day powwows in the country. A powwow is a gathering of Native people where singing, dancing, food, art, and culture are the focus. All are welcome to attend. We encourage you to learn more, participate, and donate by visiting [\*\*austinpowwow.net/sponsorship\*\*](https://austinpowwow.net/sponsorship).

The Austin Powwow is set to take place in November 2021.



# Black Community

On May 1st, 2021, Austin voters passed Prop B, which reinstated and expanded old laws that criminalized homelessness.

The new laws make it a crime for people experiencing homelessness to:

- sleep on any public land if they have any possessions;
- sit or lie down on any public land in the downtown or University of Texas area;
- and ask for help after 7 pm, or anytime around specified infrastructure or in an "aggressive" manner.

These laws took effect on May 11th and unhoused people now face immediate threats to their safety and their ability to exist in public spaces throughout the city. New efforts already in motion seek to create "sanctioned campsites" where people could legally camp, but these proposals risk further concentrating poverty in Black and brown neighborhoods and diverting resources needed for housing.

We cannot allow extreme poverty to simply be hidden from view so we no longer feel compelled to help. We must keep everyone focused on providing housing options that work for people and making policy changes that prevent homelessness. With eviction moratoriums set to expire, thousands of families will become homeless and be criminalized.

Local leaders recently agreed to a plan to house 3000+ people in 3 years. Our cause is even more urgent now. We must make sure city and county officials keep and exceed those commitments.

Please sign this petition to help the Austin Justice Coalition keep the pressure on officials to do the right thing and provide homes, not handcuffs.

Sign the petition by visiting **[austinjustice.org/sign-the-petition-fund-the-summit-plan](https://austinjustice.org/sign-the-petition-fund-the-summit-plan)**.

# Latino Community

## How can others be allies for the Latino community and act?

"Take time to understand the history and the complexity of the Latino experience in the USA. Understand the history of the terms we use to describe the Latino community and how/why they were designed. Use your power to uplift the Latino community wherever possible (Hire Latino, Buy Latino, Contract with Latino companies, Vote Latino, invite Latino, etc). Our system is based on access and if Latinos do not have access to people, power, places, jobs, capital, they will never have equity."

"A co-conspirator is an active participant in the fight for equity and justice."

**Jonathan Barona**  
**Austin Community**  
**Foundation**





# LGBTQIA+ Community

June is Pride Month. We asked local poet, educator, and organizer, KB Brookins to share insight on allyship, activism, and ways to support the LGBTQIA+ community.

KB encourages supporters to donate to the many LGBTQIA+-led efforts that exist in Austin. Some organizations to consider include Embrace Austin, Black Trans Leadership of Austin, Austin Black Pride, allgo, Transgender Education Network of Texas, Equality Texas, The Gender and Sexuality Center at UT Austin, Queerbomb, aGLIFF, and Transforming Wellness. They also want you to consider amplifying the organizations' work through sharing on social media and having conversations with loved ones. Volunteer with them. Get privy to this legislative session's anti-trans bills and **ADVOCATE AGAINST THEM**.

**Queerbomb's PRIDE Parade | Saturday, June 5**

[www.queerbomb.org](http://www.queerbomb.org)

**Support LGBTQIA+ businesses.**

Visit [members.austintlgbtchamber.com/list/](http://members.austintlgbtchamber.com/list/)

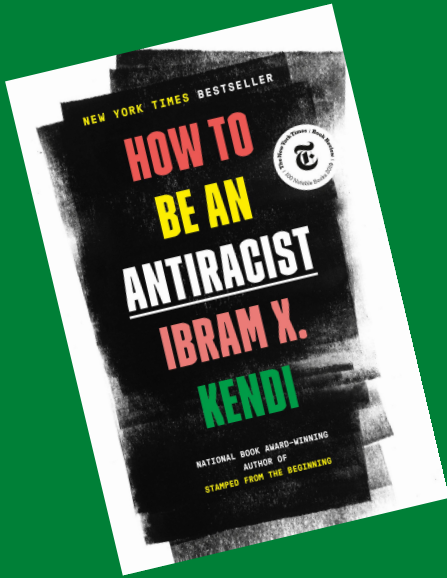


"To be an ally is to unite yourself with a community that you're not a part of through amplifying the issues & topics that matter to them. Being a co-conspirator is taking allyship a step further: interrupting harmful language, legislation, or action against the community that you're an ally to; moving out of the way to make space for leaders that are directly impacted by the issues; speak up, not over, the communities that you are an ally to; donate to community-led initiatives and community members; educate yourself on the issues; etc."

**- KB Brookins**  
poet, educator, organizer  
they/them

# "How to be an Antiracist"

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER • #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER



# AVAILABLE NOW

Donate to the  
**BLACK LEADERS** *Collective*

In May, the Black Leaders Collective held a press conference alongside elected officials and community leaders to voice concerns about the City of Austin's plan to erect homeless camps. Of the 46 sites proposed:

- 60% are in East Austin
- 39 are in areas considered to be food deserts
- 9 are on a landfill

It is through the work of Black-led organizations like BLC that we are able to hold city leadership accountable for their choices and advocate for necessary change. Visit <http://blackleaderscollectiveatx.com> to learn more about BLC. You can also support the organization by donating.



