



1-25-2016

Allies: What Are They Good For?

Beau K. Charles
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge>

 Part of the [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), and the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Charles, Beau K., "Allies: What Are They Good For?" (2016). *SURGE*. 258.
<http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/258>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/258>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Allies: What Are They Good For?

Abstract

Following the exposure of An Oppression, the well-meaning ask: “What can I do to be a good ally?”

The word ally does not resonate with me. As a queer, I have had supposed-allies threaten me with the revocation of their alliance if I did not comply with their demands or if I questioned their actions; use their alliance as a way to co-opt queer experiences; divert and control arguments; and invade queer-specific spaces. The offering of the “identity” ally occurs conditionally. In my case, the topic at hand must focus on The Gays to remind people to remind me that they are on my side. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Fearless Friday, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Civil Rights Movement, Fearless Friday, Gettysburg College, leadership, psychology, RATCo, religion, Selma, Social Justicealliance, ally, allyship, Education, Gettysburg College, language, LGBTQIA, oppression, protest, Race, racism, Social Justice, Solidarity, Town Hall Meeting

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies

Comments

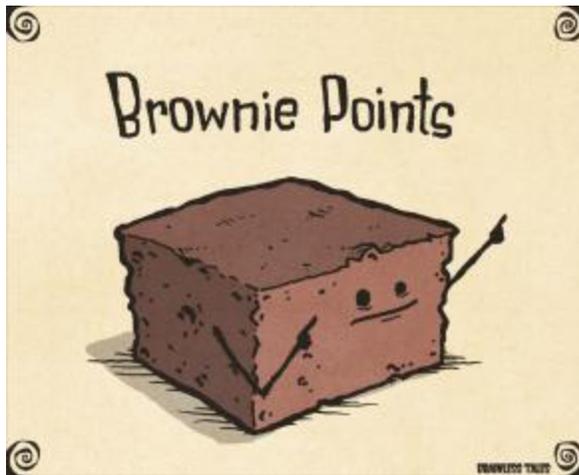
Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

Allies: what are they good for?

[January 25, 2016](#)



Following the exposure of An Oppression, the well-meaning ask: "What can I do to be a good ally?"

The word ally does not resonate with me. As a queer, I have had supposed-allies threaten me with the revocation of their alliance if I did not comply with their demands or if I questioned their actions; use their alliance as a way to co-opt queer experiences; divert and control arguments; and invade queer-specific spaces. The offering of the "identity" ally occurs conditionally. In my case, the topic at hand must focus on The Gays to remind people to remind me that they are on my side.

To me, hearing "ally" uttered from the lips is a brownie point, a plea, a defense. I'm reminded of grade school platitudes: show, don't tell: actions speak louder than words. If someone identifies themselves to me as an ally of the LGBTQIA community, I refrain from emoting because I respond contemptuously. Allies do not like to hear that I do not care for them; they swell up: "you would not have gotten this far without us" without thinking that I would not have to work so hard for dignity and rights if not for them in the first place. Progress is not a matter of the Oppressed changing but of the Oppressor finally losing a hand, a hold. (And never does this change happen in peaceful appeals but through riot, protest, boycott, divestment, resistant, act after act of opposition, from disruptive thoughts to militia in the street.)

To Be An Ally suggests ally is a state, a space, a reachable status.

To begin, you do not check off boxes, tally your points, and register as an ally. To be in alliance requires constant performance, not simply agreeing with This or opposing That. Ally is not static. A supposed ally can commit actions and behaviors that contradict what they profess to stand for and the people they stand with under that title "ally." Should they lose the right to call themselves an ally? Allies are far from

perfect: not perfect people, not perfect allies. It is unlearning and education, diligence and consistency. There is no end to that.

The more you pursue “being a good ally,” as a noun, the more you’re forced to define it. That definition will inevitably be less than it deserves or more than humanly possible.

I stand in solidarity with; act in solidarity with; speak in solidarity with many people. While these actions may be the actions of one in an alliance, I am not an ally.

Let me provide the minimum basics of good solidarity conduct: first and foremost, commit actions that will improve the conditions of the people you want to support; gather resources, do your homework; beware the [commodification](#) of allyship; come when you can, when invited, when needed; do not assume everyone is a master of their oppression nor capable nor willing to instruct you on dismantling it; do not blame yourself for the systems that benefit you but do not excuse yourself from reaping the rewards. Challenge. Criticize. Change.

Soul-deep good people cannot always stand up in the moment, cannot always endure hours protesting, cannot cite Fanon and shoot down ad hominem arguments with admirable grace. Confrontation is a skill. But it’s not the only skill out there for this endeavor. Do not undervalue small, consistent acts. Remind yourself: integrity has no need of rules; character is who you are when no one is watching. I find these words particularly hard to master and all the more important for it.

Because language allows a single word to have as many meanings as it has minds perceiving it, the title “ally” translates to nothing. Now if we agree that a decision in a moment not only determines what action you take but what person you become, we can only hope to commit thoughtful actions for a bettering purpose. If we become what we have done, we have no need to declare ourselves as any one thing.

Let me close by citing [Jerome Clarke's](#) work in [Black Praxis](#) as a starting point to understand solidarity:

“The Town Hall was primarily a charge for solidarity...Solidarity as such brings to mind commitment for and identity with those who suffer. The Black Radical Tradition Conference presented all sorts of definitions:

“Principle unity with all forces tackling the same objective.” – Anthony Monteiro

“[The condition of truth is] to allow suffering to speak.” – Cornel West (a la Adorno who similarly stated that the “The need to let suffering speak is the condition of all truth.”)

“The highest form of analysis and politics” – Joanna Fernandez

“Where there is suffering, we stand” – Robin D.G. Kelley”

For the non-Burg readers, this post follows Gettysburg College’s newly historic January 21st Town Hall Meeting that explicitly laid the stories and sentiments of campus-wide racism at the feet of the

administrators, and the educators, and the students, not as an act of supplication but rather like a crime that could go ignored no longer.

We cannot anymore claim ignorance as the basis for resisting change. With the charge of solidarity put forth, as Jerome writes, this campus either reconciles or it rots.

Beau Charles '17
Contributing Writer

<https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/allies-what-are-they-good-for/>