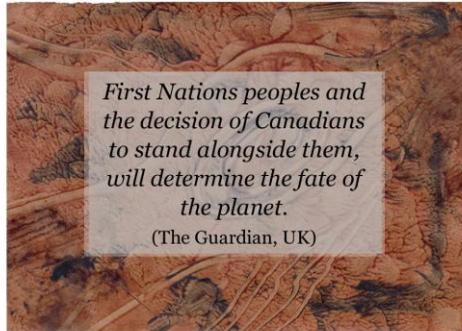
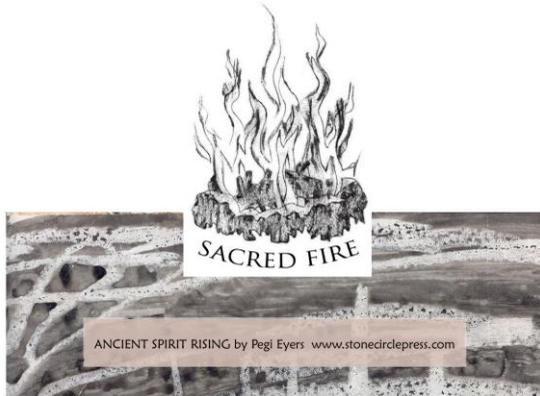


# Good Allies



being a synthesis of contemporary Ally Theory



*An ally is a member of the dominant group who questions or rejects the dominant ideology and works against oppression through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population.”<sup>1</sup>*  
(Minneapolis Committee on Civil Rights)

## Good Allies being a synthesis of contemporary Ally Theory

The continuation of ongoing First Nations resistance and the rise of new movements such as *Idle No More*, *the MMIW Inquiry*, *Unist’ot’en Camp*, *Klabona Keepers*, *Yinka Dene Alliance*, *Free Grassy Narrows*, *Elsipogtog* and *Standing Rock/Inyay Wakháŋagapi Othí* have generated a renewed focus on Indigenous human rights violations in the Americas, and we should be outraged that genocidal policies are continuing unabated. Clearly, the colonial takeover of the Americas, with its imperialist capitalist agenda and subjugation of First Nations, is still ongoing. Today, the contrast between the non-native and native world(s) could not be more extreme, and it has become apparent that the support and solidarity of non-native allies is needed more than ever. So how do we begin this important work?

In the late 1990s, new guidelines giving structure to the *Ally Process* arose from the cross-cultural challenges that native and non-native scholars and activists were encountering in their working relationships. Since then, *Ally Theory* and practice has been gaining momentum, and non-native allies are at work in social justice organizations, the media, communities, church groups and academic institutions across Turtle Island. When we become allies to First Nations and assist them in their anti-racism and anti-oppression efforts, we advance the cross-cultural learning that is integral to social justice struggles, and create radical change in ourselves, the community and the world.

In the classic work of collaboration *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships*<sup>2</sup> Trent Professor Lynne Davis describes the three types of relationships that are possible between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples:

- 1) *Walking side-by-side as with the two-row wampum, each culture following its own path, laws and customs in peaceful coexistence,*
- 2) *paternalism, which is the legacy of colonialism whereby non-Indigenous people assume that they know what is best for Indigenous peoples, and*
- 3) *Indigenous peoples provide leadership and non-Indigenous people (allies) take action in support of the direction that the Indigenous peoples have determined.*

Luckily for us, through the *Allyship* model outlined in point 3), there is now an ethical, responsible way to build relationships and conduct ourselves in solidarity with First Nations. *Allyship* is a specific **framework** that social justice activists, both First Nations and Settlers, have taken the time and trouble to learn, and is not subject to self-interpretive definitions. The potential learning curve to understanding *Allyship Theory* involves reading 5-6 key articles and essays, watching 3-4 key videos (**see Resources**) and hopefully attending a white privilege/allyship training session.

A mutual understanding of *Allyship Theory* is found in social justice spaces such as the social justice academic world of colleges and universities; in social justice collaborations between native and non-native people and organizations; with active “showing up” for demonstrations, rallies, protests and

organized actions; in white privilege/intersectional oppression and allyship trainings; in decolonizing ideology, actions, projects and ventures of all kinds; in social justice publishing such as *Rabble, Yes!* Magazine, *Geez*, the *Ytee*, *Unsettling America*, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, and *Briarpatch*; and in personal accountability.

## First Steps

Contrary to what mainstream Canada believes, First Nations are not a “special interest group” or just another part of the “multicultural mosaic” of Canada. Intrinsically connected to the land for all time, as *Original Peoples* thriving on Turtle Island for millennia, they have traditional cultures and worldviews completely bonded to place, and inherent rights to homelands through treaties and constitutional agreements. It must be understood that with or without our help, First Nations are capable of decolonizing and working toward the goals of sovereignty, which will protect the environment and benefit all Canadians in the process.

From European arrival until the present day, Indigenous groups have suffered constant interference that has served the overculture and not the First Nations themselves. Today, First Nations know what is best for them, and they are justified in taking back the personal and collective power that has been denied them for so long. Taking our direction from them as allies, we must first and foremost acknowledge our own white privilege and power, fully understand the machinations of the dominant colonial mindset, and question our unconsciousness sense of entitlement. Through the media and the schools, white people have been trained by the system to be oblivious to injustice or oppression, and to have the luxury of believing in the master narrative. Connected to a self-congratulatory nationalist social structure and having unearned unjust power, we must constantly listen to what Indigenous people are saying, and assist them on their own terms. Placing the needs and worldview of FN at the center will reverse the habitual power relationship, which is essential to eliminating racism and the intersectional oppressions. It is only by placing ourselves behind the most oppressed and moving them forward will true progress be made. And engaging as allies is a “*transformative decolonizing pathway toward more just and peaceful relations with Indigenous peoples.*”<sup>3</sup> (Paulette Regan)

## Action Points for Allies

Get to know the history of your region and the Indigenous peoples who have lived there, and who live there now, so that they are not invisible to you. What are their current struggles? What monumental work are they already doing in survivance, cultural revival, land ethics, intellectual discourse, human rights activism and decolonization? What are their successes and what are their ongoing challenges? Extending the proper respect to the original inhabitants of Turtle Island in our process as anti-racism ally is key.

Do not lean into the Indigenous knowledge of First Nations - it is enough to understand the basics of their IK and how it stems from the land, and then focus on uncovering your own ancestral EIK treasures. It may seem to be at cross-purposes to suggest that Settlers learn all they can about Turtle Island IK, but that is where a moral code comes in. To respect another culture with full knowledge of their IK, without interfering or

appropriating any elements for yourself, is what peaceful co-existence is all about. “*Recognizing native spirituality is honoring, adopting it is stealing.*”<sup>4</sup> (Robert Hood) You are only an authority when it comes to your own ancestral European Indigenous Knowledge (EIK), and avoid patronizing behavior or attitudes.

## Our Challenges as Allies

Being an ally is a practice and a process, rather than an identity or a role, and allows us to have accountable, ethical ways of working with marginalized groups. The task of forming alliances begins with the need to educate ourselves about historical and contemporary Indigenous issues. But according to the allyship framework, the ally is expected to **do their own heavy lifting**, and IT IS NOT THE JOB OF THE OPPRESSED TO EDUCATE THE OPPRESSOR. Settler-Allies enter social justice spaces already well-informed on racism, oppression and the history of colonization to the best of their ability. Allies should have a political consciousness regarding what is unjust in our society, rather than a “warm and fuzzy” need for spiritual or cultural affirmation. As an example, many of the FN “cultural teaching” events that are hosted by white people exclude First Nations folks who may not have the funds or transportation to attend a much-needed information session on their own traditions! There is something deeply wrong about a dynamic that continues to favor white privilege.

Key for allies to address in self and others is the denial of colonial violence, and the endemic lack of awareness regarding racism, white privilege and the kyriarchy of intersectional oppressions, which have been mutually determined by scholars and activists as:

Race (white at the top/people of colour below),  
gender (male at the top/female below),  
class/socioeconomic disparity (rich at the top/ middle-class and poverty below),  
sexual orientation (heterosexual at the top/LGBT community – lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender below), and  
able-bodied (healthy at the top/disabled below).

These oppressions are interchangeable, overlapping, interlocking and intersecting - unique to each individual - and as the common adage goes, “we all have some nickels in the quarter.” The inequities in our society are beyond belief - all oppressive and dehumanizing, and based on **normative white hetero-patriarchal** notions of false superiority, elitism, aggression, meritocracy, competition and hierarchy. Including speciesism, the intersectional oppressions are tightly woven together, and our most effective work as social justice activists would be to target more than one oppression at a time, i.e. by organizing an action that would challenge both disability and gender oppression. As we become more adept at the Ally process, and continue to speak out against unequal power relations, racism and oppression on principle, we anticipate that our individual and collective acts are contributing to the eventual demise of a white supremacy based on divisive and violent colorlines. “*The only requirement you need to enter allyship is a commitment to justice and human equality.*”<sup>5</sup> (Zerlina Maxwell) Allyship enlarges the awareness that those of us with white skin enjoy certain privileges and benefits, and that people of color are still attacked, marginalized and oppressed every day in the Americas.

## What Does an Ally Do?

Social activism starts with self-education, rejecting Empire, mobilizing (which is showing up for rallies and actions), followed by long-term and strategic organizing in the community that can lead to successful coalitions. Allies need to perform their solidarity work with humility and responsibility, and to be dedicated and organized if they are to be of service. At the First Nations community level it is better not to approach with a specific goal in mind, but rather to enquire what the priorities are, and humbly ask what can be done in the spirit of solidarity. Building trust can be difficult and time-consuming, and the complexity of relationships challenging, but we need to be open to learning from each other.

Join your local activist community. Protests, marches, demonstrations and civil disobedience (with proper permits of course) all have the potential to create social change either incrementally or suddenly. Our priority should be addressing political realities such as dismantling racism, repatriating Indigenous lands and property, and the 94 Recommendations from the final TRC report.

Select your battle(s). To affect political reform and social change we must have an active participation in electoral politics to change the archaic legislation affecting Indigenous people. Initiate petitions, call, write and pressure your MP, cabinet members or the Prime Minister; write letters to the editors of major newspapers; and lobby and form outreach groups to mobilize at the local, regional or national level. Social media offer spontaneity in direct actions and patterns of political activism.

Speak Up! Call out other white people on their racism, stereotyping and micro-aggressions when we encounter this behavior in person, public dialogues or on social media. Unfortunately, being an anti-racism spokesperson can make you a target for hostility, denial, and online opprobrium from other members of the dominant society. There are literally thousands of creative and angry rebuttals those in the overculture will come up with to evade responsibility for their hegemony and privilege. Apparently, many white people feel that “whiteness” is above reproach, and this is just not true. By condemning “whiteness” as the historical colonizer and the ruling elite, you may be accused of racism against white people, but do not fall into this trap. It is not more racism to see clearly that the source of racism and racist behavior, both historically and in modern times, is coming from white people, and it is we who are white that need to make change, not any other group. After centuries of unquestioned superiority, we need to challenge our deep sense of entitlement, and learn new skills for honest discussion and actions on “race.”

In addition to “calling out” we need to “call in” by encouraging dialogue, showing patience and compassion, and trusting that difficulties are part of the transformation toward shared values. Ultimately, our role as allies is to engage with other white folks in the educational process, not to sidetrack the discomfort we feel by over-reacting, dismissing each other, or hurling insults. As allies, Indigenous people and people of colour are counting on us to educate and engage other white people, as we are the ones who have the most influence with white people and access to white spaces!

It is a balancing act for sure, but the last thing we should do is turn away in frustration or anger from the difficult conversations we need to be having.

When a First Nations person asks for help or assistance in person, through an organization or on social media, respond! Learn humility, listen, and be willing to get “hands-on” with the real needs of the First Nations person or group.

Offer your skills as a volunteer for any number of pressing issues, projects or organizations. Assist non-native or native-led wellness, social justice, or environmental NPO/NGO organizations that benefit Indigenous communities with your time, resources and/or money. Support businesses, alliances and organizations that actively honour the uniqueness and beauty of First Nations-led education and cultural expressions.

Inform yourself with reading, research and awareness-raising. Then, educate others who share your white identity on colonialism, honoring treaties, respecting the protocols of the land, making governments accountable, mobilizing resources, and taking action on addressing systemic racism and oppression everywhere it is found (in government, the legal system, the media, the commons, and within other social movements such as feminism). Offer training on white privilege, the intersectional oppressions and allyship, and make anti-racism training mandatory in the workplace!

## Ally Mistakes ~ Oops!

In our work as Allies we need to stay away from the methods of the colonizer, which include perpetuating stereotypes, patronizing behavior, the use of perspectivism (assuming others share our worldview), or making rules for the disenfranchised group. It is quite possible that Indigenous people hear the solutions and aspirations as offered by white people as patronizing, arrogant or ill-informed. Assuming you know what Indigenous communities need in terms of western ideology or infrastructure, and imposing these “benefits” on them intentionally (or with subterfuge), is known as the “white savior” complex. White people are not heroes or heroines riding in on a white horse to save everybody (!) we are assisting a group of people who already have a plan in place. Allies cannot presume to know about the experience of Indigenous people, or to speak authoritatively about Indigenous community. Targets of oppression are experts on the totality of their oppression and we need to listen to them. Our task is to be mindful of how power is operating in any given context, to think before speaking (if we must speak), and to let the Indigenous voices be heard. We are cautioned by experienced activists to understand that our anti-oppression work is not about *our* needs, or to feel good about ourselves, but *it is about the needs of the targets not to be oppressed.*

## Empathy

There is an exciting new movement happening called *The Power of Outrospection*<sup>6</sup> (Roman Krznaric) that promotes the enlargement of our empathic potential by stepping outside of ourselves, discovering the lives of others, and expanding our moral universe. For example, empathy was a major driver for the principles to abolish slavery in 1834, and nurturing this connective power across colorlines, time and space can lead to monumental social change. Forming empathic bonds with First

Nations community can make us more compassionate people and “*our instinctive resistance to the unjust treatment of others will make Allyship and solidarity natural and normative behaviors.*”<sup>7</sup> (Tim Wise)

In the end, allies perform their work **on principle** because it is the right thing to do. Allies do not need constant supervision, they do not need ongoing approval from Indigenous people or their own peers, and their hard work often goes unnoticed and unappreciated.

## In Conclusion

Ally is a verb not a noun! You are only an ally when you are performing an **action** on behalf of First Nations human rights, legal issues or environmental justice, and advancing social justice in general. It is best **not** to use “ally” as a self-identifier, unless you have studied and embody *Allyship Theory*. According to the *Allyship Framework*, it is the oppressed group who determines **who** is an ally. Often allies perpetuate neo-liberalism, and unthinkingly continue to re-colonize.

The main guideline of the *Allyship Framework* is that the Settler-Ally takes a back seat to the oppressed group, to advance the equality that will lead to equity. Long-term allyship requires that our solidarity relationships are based on the principles of decolonization, and that we are committed to the well-being and sovereignty of the Indigenous community as a whole. After years of being entangled in a web of colonialism, settler culture, racism and structural inequality, First Nations are finally empowered by *Ally Theory* to set forth tasks for non-native people to perform.

Allies know that silence is no longer an option, feel empowered to speak out, and believe that at some point in the future a determined collective force will undo racism. According to the original Quaker definition, “speaking truth to power” means communicating first to those in power, then to the citizenry, and finally to the notion of power itself. When we become Allies to Indigenous people who have a long history of survivance and resistance, and who are now engaged in powerful decolonization strategies, we reject the ethics of hierarchy, domination and eco-genocide that harm us all. First Nations worldviews that protect and revere the earth are still in place today, and by assisting them in their struggles for sovereignty, we are ensuring that precious watersheds, lands and ecosystems will be protected for all in *Earth Community*. In collaboration with all those who have resisted injustice in the past, present and future, we are committed to that struggle.

**IN THE END, ALLYSHIP IS  
A COMMITMENT TO  
ACHIEVING JUSTICE FOR  
THE OPPRESSED GROUP.**

## Notes

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## Resources

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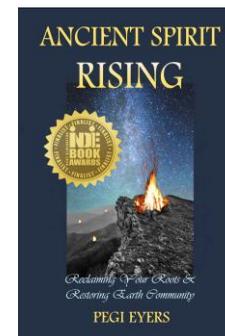
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Pegi Evers is the author of ***Ancient Spirit Rising: Reclaiming Your Roots & Restoring Earth Community***, an award-winning book that explores strategies for intercultural competency, healing our relationships with Turtle Island First Nations, decolonization, recovering an ecocentric worldview, rewinding, creating a sustainable future and reclaiming peaceful co-existence in Earth Community.

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