



White Allies, What Are You Really Doing?

By Educator Barnes – October 28, 2021

On an episode of “In Living Color,” Jim Carrey did a parody of Robert Van Winkle who is more commonly known as Vanilla Ice. In the “rap,” he said, “I’m white and I’m capitalizing on a trend that’s currently rising.” Later, the backup singers asked, “When it’s gonna stop?” Carrey, as Vanilla Ice replied, “Maybe never. I become richer with every endeavor. I’m living large and my bank is stupid ‘cause I just listen to real rap and dupe it.”

Throughout the parody, Carrey is out of sync with the backup dancers, who all appear to be Black. Towards the end, Carrey went from doing the worm on the floor to doing aerobic exercises. That's when the backup dancers bounced. If you watch the parody with the sound off and focus on the dancing, it won't take much to see how ridiculous Carrey, as Vanilla Ice, looks.

When I watched this video, I thought of white education activists who showed up after George Floyd was killed proclaiming they were anti-racist and culturally responsive and could show others how to be anti-racist and culturally responsive, too. To borrow words from the parody, "they listen to Black activists and advocates and dupe it." Like Carrey in this parody, they have taken center stage taking steps that are out of sync with the actions of people of color, especially Black people, who have been grinding, many times, in the background doing the work never meeting a beat.

Does anyone remember the black boxes? That was a day where people posted black boxes online to show they were going to be silent and let Black people amplify their voices. No, this is not what we want, and it is not what any of us asked for. The time to fall back is when we are trying to explain what we need and what it will take to ensure Black students are successful. Instead of being silent, they try to inform us of what we should do as if we have not been doing this work before they allegedly became woke. They are holding book clubs and posting on Instagram while real activists are trying to get laws changed and ensure all students have access to a good education.

Instead of making sure diverse voices are in the room, these white education activists and advocates are collecting paycheck after paycheck for work they just now started when people of color have been in the trenches for years, even decades. If this is you ... if you are a thief unearned praise for being an anti-racist, culturally responsive, allegedly down for the cause activist, you should fall back and consider why you need the spotlight right now. What is your purpose? Are you capitalizing on a trend? Who have you helped? What systemic impact have you made? If you can't answer these questions then, you probably out here clapping on the one and three, dancing off-beat, making a fool of yourself in the name of DEI work. Please just stop and go spend more time learning how to be in sync with the people who have been doing the work, and consider the possibility that maybe your place is as a backup dancer and not center stage as the lead.