

# White Anti-Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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*ABSTRACT* South Africans today live not only with the memory of the racial injustices of the past, but also with present injustices that are a consequence of that past. How should white South Africans live with these past and present injustices? On recognition of the racial injustices of the past and of the continuation of forms of white privilege today, involvement in ongoing anti-racist struggles seems to be an appropriate way for white South Africans to respond to past and present injustices. However, some discussions of the way in which white privilege operates and is perpetuated in post-segregationist societies suggest the need for caution with regard to white involvement in anti-racist struggles, arguing that some of the ways in which white people involve themselves in apparently anti-racist work actually result in the perpetuation rather than the erosion of white privilege. This article explores concerns about the intractability of white privilege while also ultimately defending the appropriateness of white involvement in anti-racist struggles.

‘... if you are a white South African, you may realise the many times you recognised and acknowledged that you were complicit, willingly or by default, in social, economic and political practices in the past that resulted in the extreme pain and suffering of others. You further recognised that although that past was unsustainable, you have not entirely shaken the hold that its emotional and material benefits once had on you. This is a most distressing realisation. How then do you translate your distress into corrective behaviour?’ (Ndebele, 2009).

## Introduction

Racial justice and racial equality have not yet been achieved in South Africa, nor indeed in the many other parts of the world which had at some time some form of explicitly segregationist white supremacist order. As Lucius Outlaw puts it, with reference to the United States, white supremacy may no longer be the ‘reigning public philosophy’, but the ‘inertial racism of white predominance’ continues