

### **Redpointing Anti-Racism by Murti Nauth**

We only met casually at the gym, but Hannah Crews agreed to join me in exploring a remote area in Tennessee, though we found little beta on Mountain Project. In the middle of the hot, humid Southeastern summer, we bushwhacked for what felt like an hour to the cliff, sustaining bug bites that lasted for months, and only climbed four pitches. We laughed the whole time at how unpredictable the day was, and we have been climbing together ever since.

Climbing is a shared activity. Whether you are with a partner who endured the elements with you on a long multi-pitch route, when you trust a belayer with your life, or meet a group of strangers who cheered you through the crux of your project, climbing thrives on community. Irrespective of your climbing goals, this community is incredibly supportive.

But even with all the love, racism permeates our space as climbers. You might think, “What does race have to do with climbing?” Climbing, in spirit, transcends race. It is a beautiful, personal journey. Nobody is stopping me or anyone from taking on rock climbs. But in practice? If issues of race were not here, then why am I so often the only person of color at the crag? Why, as I arrive and throw down my rope, is everyone pretending not to stare at me? Why are the pros whom young climbers look up to almost entirely white? Am I the only one offended by the name of that route? In many ways the community is friendly and welcoming: when you continuously whip on the crux of a long Rifle route, people still cheer you on. But, as a climber of color, I find questions like these often stir in the back of my mind.

Racism is sustained by fear: fear of the unfamiliar, of being wrong, of feeling guilty, of an awkward situation. Racism was born of fear, and fear perpetuates it. As climbers, we are no strangers to fear. How many times have you prayed not to fall, not here, not now? A beautiful part of the sport is how empowered you feel after you send, or sometimes even after you whip. You cope with fear, and often you find you are more capable than you imagined.

Right now, we should all be fighting for Black lives to matter as much as white lives. As climbers, we can do simple things to make our own community even more supportive. When you see a person of color at the crag, it’s understandable that you might look twice. But do this too: say “Hi!”

Treat us as you would any other experienced climber. Please don’t ask if we know your other friend who is also our race or where we’re “really from.” If you’re thinking of it, sure, please do invite my partner and me for a beer or even to the post-climbing feast.

When you lie down in your tent to relax after a long day of crushing, consider picking up a book about the experiences of people of color in America. Some excellent choices are Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, President Barack Obama’s *Dreams From My Father*, Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*, Ibram X. Kendi’s *Stamped from the Beginning*, Ijeoma Oluo’s *So You Want to Talk About Race*, or anything by James Baldwin.

Since there aren't many of us to meet at the crag or the gym yet, let's take the discussion outside of climbing: Consider getting a beer with your coworker of color, even if it means missing a training sesh. If you have friends of color, listen to their personal experiences, if they choose to share them.

Dismantling the scaffolding of racism can be exhausting. So can climbing. But any of us who have trained for a redpoint know that when you hit the point of exhaustion is when the real progress begins. Taking on issues of race, whether from a place of guilt-inducing privilege or resentment-inducing struggle, can be uncomfortable. It can hurt in ways you've never experienced before. It might feel like you struggle mightily for meager progress. Come to think of it, it might feel a lot like climbing an off-width. But that's what we have to do if we want to top out on this one.