

Applause from Jay Jernigan, Kathy Moore, and 1 other



Katie Dunne McGrath

Retired advertising executive. Musician. Unpaid protester.

Sep 13, 2017 · 3 min read



Photo Source: NY Daily News

## Heather Heyer, White Privilege and Girl Power

Noted feminist and scholar Peggy McIntosh describes white privilege as “an invisible, weightless knapsack of assets and resources that she was given because she was born white in her time and place in U.S. society.” In other words, white folks don’t need to say White Lives Matter. Of course they matter. Their value is implied in every quality of life statistical gap between whites and non-whites from birth to death, including infant mortality, life expectancy and everything in between.

White guilt is the belief that being white is, in and of itself, a transgression against the non-white world. This state of guilt can be the direct result of becoming aware of one’s state of white privilege: As a white woman my life is likely to be easier, richer and longer than my non-white counterparts. I did nothing to deserve it except to take advantage of the benefits my skin color and social background offered me.

Awareness of white privilege can be highly motivating, stimulating personal activism to balance the racial scales in the community, nation and world. But white guilt can be paralyzing, the shame of it preventing white women from speaking out as progressive citizens, and fearing being the pale person in an otherwise colorful crowd.

In the clearing smoke of the violent weekend in Charlottesville and the soul-baring, stream of consciousness show of white nationalism by our white president that followed, a hero emerged to inspire progressive white American women, especially those stymied by white guilt, to get over the guilt and get into the street.

She is Heather Heyer, the 32-year old paralegal from Charlottesville who was mowed down by a 20-year old white supremacist from Ohio. Heather's final Facebook post from last November suggests that her presence as a protester Saturday wasn't unusual behavior: "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention."

Heather's courage and commitment recalls that of another white American female, Viola Gregg Liuzzo, who, like Heather, died expressing her devotion to racial equality and justice. Viola, a housewife and mother from Detroit, drove alone to Alabama to help with the Selma march after seeing televised reports of the attack at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. She was ferrying marchers between Selma and Montgomery when she was shot and killed by a Klansmen in a passing car. (Source: Southern Poverty Law Center.)

The American president at the time of Viola's death, Lyndon B. Johnson, went to great lengths to express his demand that Viola's murderers were brought to justice, and they were. The current national reaction to Trump's response to her murder has been the outrage Heather encouraged in that final Facebook post.

We don't have the luxury of treating Heather's death as another freakish bump in the road that is the Trump presidency. White women can take this chance to cast aside privilege and guilt to channel Heather's power as our own, including her practice of spending more time marching for justice than posting about it. She is the hero we need to give us permission to be historic agents of positive change in these times of trouble, whatever our color or gender.



