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RACISM AND UNDERSTANDING WHITE PRIVILEGE

RACISM

Racism, also called racialism, is prejudice or discrimination directed towards a person or group of individuals based on a membership to a certain racial or ethnic group. It is also a belief that a different race possesses distinct characteristics, abilities or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to the other.

Historically, those who openly professed or practiced racism held that members of low-status races should be limited to low-status jobs and members of the dominant race should have exclusive access to political power, economic resources, high-status jobs and unrestricted civil rights. Racism manifested around the 18th century as a result of Africans who were taken to Europe and turned to slaves, this action gave people of the European origin the notion that those of African descent whose ancestors had been involuntarily enslaved and transported to Americas were less than them. By characterizing Africans and their African American descents as lesser human beings, slavery attempted to justify and maintain the system of exploitation while portraying the United States as a bastion and champion of human freedom. By the 19th century, racism had matured and spread around the world. In many countries, leaders began to think of the ethnic components of their own societies, usually religious or language groups, in racial terms and to designate higher and lower races. Those seen as lower races were exploited for their labour and discrimination against them became a common pattern in many areas of the world.

Racism reflects an acceptance of the deepest forms and degrees of divisiveness and carries the implication that differences between groups are so great that they cannot be transcended. Racism inflicts hatred and distrust and tarnishes any attempt to understand its victims. In a given study between the black and white colours

(Africans and Americans), racism portrays majorly as the Africans being oppressed by the Americans because the Americans see themselves as superiors.

Racism is not inherited. You are not automatically racist if your father or mother is a racist. It is developed as a result of what you perceive right or wrong.

Jane Elliott, a school teacher back in 1963 who created the blue eyes, brown eyes experiment after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King addressed her class;

“you are not born a bigot. You have to learn to be a bigot and anything you learn you can unlearn”.

24 years later in 1992, the experiment was conducted again but this time at an Oprah Winfrey show. When they arrived they were not separated on the basis of their skin but of their eye colour, the blue eyes were separated from the brown eyes but they did not know they were grouped based on their eye colour. Those with blue eyes were told to wait outside, while those with brown eyes were ushered into a room and treated very politely. Those with blue eyes on the other hand were treated poorly and discriminated. Brown eyed audiences were given coffee and donuts on their seats, while the blue eyed were left standing in a crowded room without refreshments for over 2 hours. The blue eyed people became upset when they noticed how the brown eyed people were being treated. After those 2 hours the blue eyed group became angry and began to revolt. Finally, they were all seated inside the hall. On the show Jane Elliott discussed how in her 20 years of teaching she has noticed that brown eyed children are more brilliant and self-tasking than blue eyed children. The blue eyed people were mocked and discriminated because of the colour of their eyes and the brown eyed people supported the notion.

Members of the blue eyed group complained on how they were treated poorly and rudely compared to the brown eyed group who were treated hospitably and politely. A lady from the brown eyed group stood up to address the blue eyed group on how rude they were being to the employees and so noisy that the brown eyed group could not

hear themselves talk, further going on to say that she had a friend back in school who was blue eyed and always copied off of her work. Another lady from the blue eyed group stood up with a card board sign that read '*NO BLUEY ALLOWED*', she said it was pasted on the bathroom doors. Jane went on to say if she was assigned to take off the sign from the doors and the brown eyed group laughed. Jane addressed the blue eyed group as rude, angry at a little bit of discomfort and asked that if they did not like it here they should go back to wherever they came from and the brown eyed group agreed. Another lady from the blue eyed group stood to say that they were treated poorly just because of their eye colour and pointed out that her eyes were hazel indicating more resemblance to brown than blue and that the condition and situation thrown at them was not real.

The blue eyes were more than the brown eyes and told to sit on the floor. When Jane was asked why, she said that the blue eyed group multiplied like flies. Another blue eyed lady confirmed that the colour of our eyes do not determine how intelligent we are but rather treatment and attitude, she further gave an example of a melting pot, which means that everybody should be put in a situation and mixed to come out the same so that white people and blue eyed people feel comfortable with them. Jane explained that the country does not need a melting pot, instead a salad bowl. Where everyone of different shape, size, colour, characteristics and importance are placed to maintain their identity and their differences. More examples were traced back in time of when Adolf Hitler, a blue eyed German politician who orchestrated the killing of over 10 million brown eyed people because they were Jewish people trying to pass. A man from the blue eyed group stood to say that he understood what Jane was saying. He said that the event was not to teach about the colour of ones' eye but about racism. Jane said that God created the human race and humans went on to create racism.

The exercise was concluded on notes that racism was not just based on colour of the eyes or skin, as LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender) today are discriminated based on their sexual preferences and women on their gender. The tables can turn at any time and you could be the oppressed unless you stand against racism, against discrimination and against bias. Just because a white man in

power does something wrong to a black woman without power does not mean she should get even with him if the table turns. She should pledge for equity instead and treat him how she would have wanted him to treat her. People are thought right from their homes and schools that they should view or perceive everyone as the same which is not meant to be. A black man is not the same as a white woman both externally and internally. From their colour, to their height, to their hair, to their shape, to their internal organs. None are alike, the differences should be acknowledged and not covered up because of trying to gain equality or view everyone as the same.

Those who are usually oppressed by racists go on protests, demonstrations and rallies. These are all public displays of disapproval, objection or dissent towards an idea or action, typically a political one. These help to portray to the Government and those in power that a certain mass of people do not like the way they or someone in the community is treated. These rallies should be peaceful, with matches and posters and flyers that pass a message on what they want to change. Having a riot or a violent protest that involves looting and vandalism will not make the situation change, rather it deteriorates the situation and makes things worse for everyone involved.

WHITE PRIVILEGE

This is a term that is highly associated with racism. Many white people do not understand this because they are busy looking at phrases like all lives matter and all colours are the same. Meanwhile, they are born into these privileges. The white privilege is known as a white blessing, because of the colouration of your white skin, the community tends to perceive you as superior, more important, having the rights to certain pleasures. This benefits all white people over non-white people.

An experiment was taken to understand what white privilege is real. A sports instructor gathered youths, both black and white between the ages of 18 and 25 to a park. They were to race to win a hundred Dollar bill, they were all placed behind a line. Before the race started he said;

"Before I say go, I would make a couple statements and if those statements apply to you I want you to take 2 steps forward, and if they do not apply to you, I want you to remain right

where you are. Take 2 steps forward if both of your parents are still married, take 2 steps forward if you grew up with a father figure in your home, take 2 steps forward if you had access to a private education, take 2 steps forward if you had access to a free tutor growing up, take 2 steps forward if you never had to worry about your cell phone being shut off, take 2 steps forward if you never had to worry about where your next meal was going to come from, take 2 steps forward if you never had to help your mom or dad with the bills, take 2 steps forward if it was not because of your athletic ability you had to pay for college.

Now I want you all over at the front to take a look around, every statement I have made has nothing to do with anything any of you have done, has nothing to do with decisions you have made. We all know these people up in front have a better opportunity at winning this race, does that mean those at the back cannot race? No. We would be foolish to not realize the opportunity we have been given, we do not want to realize that we have been given a head start. But the reality is we have. Now there is no excuse, they still have to run their race, but whoever wins this race, I think it would be foolish of you not to realize that and learn more about somebody else's story. The reality is, if this was a fair race, and everyone was back at that line, I guarantee you that some of these black dudes will school all of you. It is only because you have this big of a head start that you are possibly going to win this race called life. Nothing you have done so far has put you in the lead you are in so far.

When I say go, on your mark, set, GO!!"

This exercise was to show that the 'white man privilege' does exist, and is more common and simple than we think. Although, there are ways by which one can use his privileges for change. More than a century ago, Belle Case LaFollette showed how anti-racist activism was done. Her role in fighting against racially segregated Government offices in 1913 and 1914 offers a template on how white Americans can genuinely assist in the crusade for racial justice. She was keenly aware that while she could not know what it felt like to be an African American confronting deeply entrenched racist structures, she could dig into the trenches and focus on action, advocacy and activism, not mere expressions of solidarity. Many at times she failed, but she did not give up. Although she did not stop racism, she was an inspiration to many white people who stood up for black people and made black people believe that they still had white coloured friends to strengthen and help support them. Her diligence and devotion to giving the black race a voice shows that the fight to freedom is not easy, but being white enables allies in this struggle to push in ways that African Americans sometimes cannot without disproportionate risk. That was Belle LaFollette's secret, she used white privilege to fight against it.