

“The entire community should have the opportunity to address our own racial biases”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Ochs, Holona, Police August 9, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

“Not enough White Americans understand that racism is much more destructive when it infects an institution like the criminal justice system.”

Michael Reed

The entire community should have the opportunity to address our own racial biases (this includes the police).

Prof Holona Ochs

[from John Blake, “‘Am I racist?’ You may not like the answer.” CNN, June 20, 2020.](#)

[Racism is] a system of advantage based on race, scholars say. It’s a collection of stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory behavior. It’s overt and covert. And it operates across an individual, group and societal level.

It’s almost impossible not to be a racist growing up in the US. If you think you’re immune from it, that denial itself is part of how racism perpetuates. . . . “You start off with the assumption that you are, because everybody living in the United States has internalized stereotypes about Black people,” says Mark Naison.

“One of the things I learned very early in my development is that everyone in American society internalized anti-Black attitudes because they are so ingrained in our culture,” he says.

People can act and think in racist ways without knowing it.

“The term racial bias perpetuates the notion that racism is beyond your control, and that’s often not the case,” says Bell, the psychology

professor. “People might not think that they have control over racism, and they can’t ever get rid of it. It’s absolutely within their control.”

It can be fiendishly difficult, though, for people to see racism in themselves, says Bell, who studies how people fail to recognize their own racism.

Some of that is because of what psychologists call “moral licensing and credentialing.” Translation: A White liberal who brags, “I would have voted for Obama a third time if I could,” may be trying to signal that he or she is beyond racism.

Individual racism isn’t as harmful as institutional racism.

People have different ideas about how to get rid of racism. Some say the focus should be on institutional racism — in schools, policing, the workplace — and not on people’s feelings.

Reed says too many White Americans see “racism as psychology” — a naval-gazing definition that focuses on what people feel inside and personal displays of racial hostility, like racial slurs.

Reed says the goal of the civil rights movement was not to make White people better. It was to purge institutions of racism so that Blacks could have equal access to jobs, housing and education.

Not enough White Americans understand that racism is much more destructive when it infects an institution like the criminal justice system, he says.

Black people who come in contact with you will probably know you’re a racist before you do. Blacks can often read White people’s body language when they’re experiencing these racist thoughts, he says. It could be something as simple as speeding up your walk when a Black man approaches on the street or hesitating to open your door when a Black man is ringing the bell. Naison says a majority of Whites practice what he calls “aversive racism,” or engaging in behavior — some of it unconscious — “which lets Black people know they are uncomfortable around them.”

One of the biggest obstacles to fighting racism is despair. There's a belief that racism will never be eliminated because it always adapts to survive, and humans are too tribal to look past superficial differences in others.

But the modern framework of racism — a racial hierarchy with White on top and Black on bottom — is a relatively recent fabrication. The notion that people with darker skin are inherently inferior was contrived around 500 years ago by Europeans to justify slavery and colonial conquest, scholars say.

History lessons won't prevent someone from being a racist. But something else can: genuine, sustained personal relationships with people of color.

Instead of "Am I racist?" ask yourself: What am I doing to stop the racism I see in the world?