

Racism, a primer

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Overview

- ~ What is racism?
- ~ Where did racism come from?
- ~ How do we get rid of racism?



Out of Order by Brian Kenny

What is racism?

- ~ Race is a **socially constructed** way that people are **classified**, in which people's physical traits (e.g. skin, hair, blood) and social practices (e.g. religion, morals, actions) are seen as **essentialized** and **unchangeable** characteristics of the whole group (Kosek, 2009: 615).



Image by Madame Marilou
@madame_Marilou

What is racism?

Racism definitions

- ~ **Racial prejudice + power**
 - ~ Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized (Dictionary)
 - ~ “[T]he state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of **group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death**” (Gilmore, 2007: 28).

What is racism?

Types of individual bias

- ~ Prejudice: “an unfair negative attitude toward a social group or a person perceived to be a member of that group” (Henkel, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2006: 101).
- ~ Stereotype: a generalization about group of people that simplifies and overgeneralizes, and is often used in discrimination (ibid.).
- ~ Discrimination: negative behavior toward people who belong to a group that denies them equal treatment (ibid.).

What is racism?

Types of individual racism

- ~ Dominative racism: “the ‘old-fashioned,’ blatant form” of racism that prompts people to “**act out bigoted beliefs**” in an “open flame of **racial hatred**” (Henkel, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2006: 102).
- ~ Aversive racism: holding sympathy for victims of past injustice, supporting racial equality in principle, seeing oneself as nonprejudiced, but also “**possess[ing] negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks**, which may be unconscious” (ibid.).
- ~ Often “more indirect and subtle” than dominative racism
- ~ It “is presumed to characterize the racial attitudes of most well-educated and liberal Whites in the United States” (ibid.).

What is racism?

White supremacy

- ~ White supremacy is the belief that “White” people are better than people who are not White.
- ~ White supremacy includes:
 - ~ The idea that African Americans are not trying hard enough to find a job or get out of poverty
 - ~ The belief that non-white people (including immigrants) carry disease
 - ~ The belief that the United States is fundamentally *by* and *for* White people (White nationalism)

What is racism?

Structural & societal racism

- ~ Institutional racism: “the intentional or unintentional manipulation or toleration of **institutional policies** (e.g., poll taxes, admissions criteria) that **unfairly restrict the opportunities** of particular groups of people” (Henkel, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2006: 101).
- ~ The idea of reverse racism is not useful because it does not recognize the structural nature of racism.
 - ~ In nearly every context in the US, white supremacy is present, so the power is held by white people.
 - ~ Reverse racism ignores this inequality in power.
 - ~ Prejudice or bias better describes a situation perceived as “reverse racism.”

What is racism?

Where did racism come from?

- ~ The form of racism in the US developed over time through law and culture.



Slave tags, Charleston, SC
(worn by enslaved people
rented out to work)
*National Museum of African
American History & Culture*

Which came 1st: Race or racism

- ~ We think of race as a biological fact that predates racism.
- ~ In fact, racism created the idea of “races”; the desire to differentiate people led to the categories.
- ~ To maintain power, colonial (US) governments made different rules for different people.
- ~ These rules began to create “races” as we know them now.

Where did racism come from?

Race in formation: Virginia Colony

- ~ Policies that treated different people differently:
- ~ Children with a European mother and African father would be servants through age 20
- ~ The white parent of a mixed child could be whipped and his or her service extended
- ~ African slaves must obey “pass laws” which poor whites were employed to enforce
- ~ Black slaves would often be whipped brutally and publicly, but laws prohibited it for white servants (Roediger, 2008: 6).



Image of Bacon's Rebellion, 1676

Racisms



Apartheid era and post-apartheid South African flags



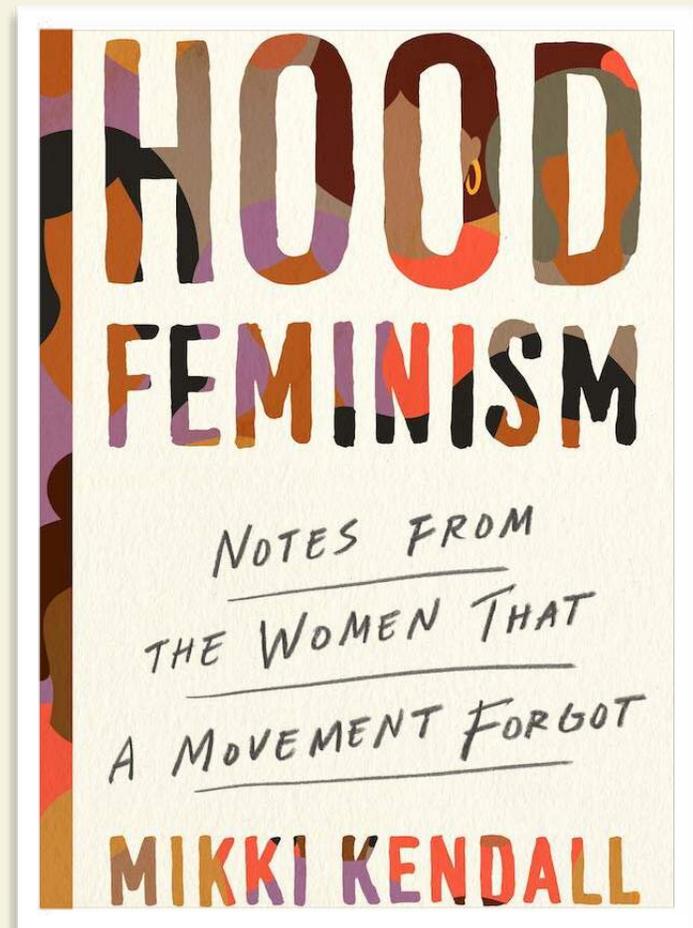
Racist signs in businesses

- ~ Racism takes different forms at different times and in different places
- ~ US racism has been “exported” around the world

Where did racism come from?

How do we get rid of racism?

- ~ Individual racism
- ~ Institutional racism
- ~ Colorblindness
- ~ Cultural racism
- ~ Aversive racism
- ~ Expectations & habits



Individual racism:

Identify it and break the habit

- ~ **Educate yourself** about racism: Read books, watch films, follow social media, ask questions (*this is ongoing but not sufficient, education should be paired with antiracist action*).
- ~ **Name stereotypes** and cultural appropriation: If you see something, say something. Be kind but firm.
- ~ Cultivate **authentic relationships** with non-White people: Make connections with people who are not like you.
- ~ **Recognize intersectionality**: Race intersects with other oppressions (gender, sexuality, disability, class/income, etc.).
 - ~ *Allow people to be whole and unique.*
 - ~ *Don't simplify people's experiences into Blackness or racism.*

How do we get rid of racism?

Institutional racism: Identify & dismantle it

- ~ **Identify policies** that restrict the opportunities of people based on race: in government, in schools, in housing, anywhere.
- ~ **Change the policies**
 - ~ Eliminate restrictions based on race (look for stand-ins for race or ethnicity such as: type of employment, language, immigration status, etc.).
 - ~ Formulate policies that address inequality (current and past).

How do we get rid of racism?

Colorblindness:

Avoid it

- ~ **Colorblindness harms** more than it helps.
 - ~ If you don't see race, you can't see (or fight) racism.
 - ~ If you are blind to race, you will also ignore part of people's identities and experiences.
 - ~ If policies are colorblind, they will maintain the status quo. The status quo in the US now is racism & white supremacy.
- ~ **Be colorconscious:** *Talking about racism is not being racist.*
 - ~ Support colorconscious policy that addresses inequality.
 - ~ Expose the assumed neutrality of Whiteness (Smith, 2013: 782).

How do we get rid of racism?

Cultural racism: Change the norms

- ~ **Insist** that white supremacy is wrong and damaging.
- ~ **Affirm positive norms**
 - ~ All people deserve equal treatment and respect.
 - ~ Inequality, past and present, should be addressed.
- ~ **Avoid harmful patterns of the past**
 - ~ Be careful not to fetishize or objectify people or culture.
 - ~ “Black is beautiful,” but Black people are not exotic or objects for white entertainment.

How do we get rid of racism?

Aversive racism:

Do not fail to help

- ~ Background: Henkel et al. (2006) argue that aversive racism was present after Hurricane Katrina when white people **failed to help** people of color.
- ~ Psychological studies show that White people are less likely to help a non-White person if other people are around (but *not* less likely to help a White person); the feeling of personal obligation decreases.
- ~ **Ask:** Is there a way that I could be helping that I am not (that might be influenced by race)? Can my communities help address the inequalities we see?
- ~ **In politics:** Vote and advocate according to your values related to inequality (reduce poverty, provide social services, make affordable housing available, etc.).

How do we get rid of racism?

Expectations & habits

- ~ Do not expect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to educate you or want to hear about your grief or pain about racism.
- ~ Speak from your own experience. Do not speak for others. Do amplify the voices of marginalized people.
- ~ Make a plan to combat racism that utilizes your strengths and those of your community.
- ~ Know that you will make mistakes and be humble when you do.
- ~ Show respect and care for others and yourself.

How do we get rid of racism?

Sources

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Questions?

THE WAY TO RIGHT WRONGS IS TO
TURN THE LIGHT OF TRUTH UPON THEM.

IDA B. WELLS