

Racism: A Conversation We Can No Longer Avoid

By Frenetta Tate

In recent years, months, weeks and days; Racism has showed up in many forms; from murders, arrests, various cases between individuals, companies to social media, workplace issues and law enforcement. I do not see nor do I comprehend how people can say that it does not exist or how they cannot see it happening around them. Racism is not just a black and white issue. **It is a human issue.** I have gathered definitions of the most regularly used terms on this subject. I think it is important to be educated about what we are really talking about when it comes to race. It is a topic that affects every person on this entire planet. No one is exempt from being affected by Racism. Whether it is in your face or you ignore it. Your ignoring it does not cease it to be. Your saying that it does not exist does not cease it from existing. It will only not exist in your mind and what you choose to believe but it is laid bare. **It is important that people recognize Racism as existing because you cannot change what you don't see as a problem. You cannot change yourself if you do not believe you are contributing to the problem whether consciously or subconsciously.**

I believe, first and foremost; we've got to get our understanding on the same page when it comes to racism. It is a touchy subject because no one wants to talk about it. No one wants to believe that they could possibly be harboring racism within themselves. It is okay, if you do. It is not okay, if you ignore it and continue to operate in such a way that affects others disproportionately and unfairly.

Racism consists of both prejudice and discrimination based in social perceptions of biological differences between peoples. Let me stop here and define a couple of terms.

Prejudice = prejudgment, or forming an opinion before becoming aware of the relevant facts of a case.

Discrimination = action that denies social participation or human rights to categories of people based on prejudice.

It often takes the form of **social actions, practices or beliefs**, or **political systems** that consider different races to be ranked as inherently superior or inferior to each other, based on presumed shared inheritable traits, abilities, or qualities. It may also hold that members of different races should be treated differently.

Racial profiling is discrimination based on *stereotypes*. "Any police-initiated action that relies on the race, ethnicity, or national origin rather than the behavior of an individual or information that leads the police to a particular individual who has been identified as being, or having been, engaged in criminal activity."

Racial discrimination refers to the *separation of people* through a process of social division into categories not necessarily related to races for purposes of differential treatment. Racial segregation policies may formalize it, but it is also often exerted without being legalized. Institutional racism (also known as structural racism, state racism or systemic racism) is

racial discrimination by governments, corporations, religions, or educational institutions or other large organizations with the power to influence the lives of many individuals. Another definition, as coined and defined by Stokely Carmichael is *“the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture or ethnic origin”*.

Modern Racism is characterized by *outwardly acting unprejudiced while inwardly maintaining prejudiced attitudes*, and displaying subtle prejudiced behaviors such as actions informed by attributing qualities to others based on racial stereotypes, and evaluating the same behavior differently based on the race of the person being evaluated. This view is based on studies of prejudice and discriminatory behavior, where some people will act ambivalently towards black people, with positive reactions in certain, more public contexts, but more negative views and expressions in more private contexts.

As you can see, there are definitions of racism; its types and forms, yet I agree wholehearted with this definition, for it covers all of it:

“... ANY distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (Part 1 of Article 1 of the U.N. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination)

I wonder how different the world would be if we took one day and laid aside our assumptions and experiences, if we could just lay aside what we were taught by others and see people as simply human without all the stuff we add, without adding our experiences, our background, our race, our cultural categories and all those other things separating us from one another and see each other as just another human being. Could you do it? The Societal Nakedness Challenge. Can society be naked? Can we strip each other and ourselves of what separates us and just ‘BE’?

In order for our world to change in this area; we’ve got to first deal with our own hearts, individually and objectively. We’ve got to look at what we truly believe, what we were taught, how we operate, how we connect with others and what drives those interactions, what drives our decisions and why. This takes an extreme self-reflection; a look within ourselves with a commitment to change what is truly not right and fair. We literally have to separate all the stuff we were taught from what is right and true. I am not saying what you were taught was wrong because I have no idea what you were taught but I believe it is worth examining for your own edification and enlightenment.

We have to search our hearts and pull out what does not connect to the truth of what love really is. Those who are not willing to take an objective stance and look at those beliefs while being courageous enough to drop them and raise their consciousness will not change. As well, those who have a distorted view of what love is will not find it in the heart search

because if we don't have a good, wholesome understanding of love; then we are not going to fully understand the underlying wrongs of racism; no matter the form.

You see, from what I have read and studied, it all comes back around to love. Love for our fellow man, no matter the race, color, descent, national or ethnic origin. This is not easy. Many minds are ingrained with certain kinds of thinking that separates and divides, rather than unify. So, let us pray about this issue because people are truly hurting and 'hurt people hurt people'. We've got to have an understanding that our hearts can only change when we commit to implementing the kind of change that will have the most positive impact in our communities and our world.

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