

RACIAL & HEALTH EQUITY: Make It Your Business

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Learn: What Does Racism Look Like?

Whether we recognize it or not, racism exists throughout our society. Racism is often thought of as a set of individual beliefs, attitudes, or actions. But racism is much more than individual prejudice – racism is ingrained in our institutions, culture, policies and practices. Stanford psychologist Steven O. Roberts says, “Racism is a system of advantage based on race. It is a hierarchy. Racism is so deeply embedded within U.S. minds and U.S. society that it is virtually impossible to escape.”

Racism isn’t always blatant hate speech. More often than not, racism is subtle and works to devalue and deny Black, Indigenous and people of color privileges and benefits afforded to white people. Racism persists in our schools, court systems, hospitals, government agencies and other institutions. In both subtle and overt ways, whiteness is equated with value in our society. Extensive academic research and data show that racism causes disparities in education, upward mobility, housing, job security, health and other areas of life for Black, Indigenous and people of color.

Unfortunately, many Americans still view racism as something that only existed in the past. While our society has made progress towards racial equity, we still have a long way to go. Just because we have made advancements in certain areas, such as electing the first Black president, doesn’t mean that racial injustice is no longer an issue. Racism has been a part of American society from our beginnings and continues to prevent Black, Indigenous and communities of color from accessing the same opportunities as their white counterparts.

Let’s look at two examples:



Racism in Higher Education

Because racism is so deeply ingrained in our society, people can sometimes be unaware of their own racist actions. A recent study found that college professors, across a range of disciplines, respond more consistently to requests from prospective graduate students with “white sounding” names. This form of racial bias is just one small example of how Black, Indigenous and people of color experience racism in higher education.



Mascots and Representation

How your cultural community is represented in media matters. Black, Indigenous and people of color face blatant and subtle forms of racism within media every day. From dehumanizing sports mascots, to racist stereotypes or a complete lack of representation (invisibility), media can have a powerful role in shaping attitudes and reinforcing racism.

For example, Indigenous people are still reduced to racist sports mascots, logos and dehumanizing characters in media. This has become so normalized in American culture that it can be easily dismissed, or even challenging, to recognize as a serious form of racism. But racist mascots have serious consequences for Indigenous peoples. In fact, the American Psychological Association (APA) has called for the immediate retirement of all Native American mascots, symbols, images and personalities by schools, colleges, universities and athletic teams. APA’s position is based on a growing body of research that show that Native mascots seriously harm the development, social identity and self-esteem of Indigenous youth.

Reflect: Identifying Racism Around You



Where do you see racism normalized in your workplace, family or community?
Have you always been aware of it?

Why do you think it might be easier to see racism as just individual actions, rather than ingrained into our culture and society?

How do you respond if someone challenges your own actions and sees them as racist?
Do you get defensive or see it as an opportunity to learn and grow? What can you do differently?

Change: Steps Toward Progress



Start to recognize racism in our society and yourself

We have all been raised in a society that elevates white culture over others. Recognizing the racist beliefs that we have internalized is the first step to address racism. Accepting that we hold racist beliefs can be an uncomfortable process, but this is necessary to create positive change in ourselves, families and society.

Resources to help you understand and recognize racism:

- “So You Want to Talk About Race” by Ijeoma Oluo
- “My Grandmother’s Hands” by Resmaa Menakem
- “Me and White Supremacy” by Layla Saad
- “White Rage; the Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide” by Carol Anderson
- “The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism and Engage in Collective Healing” by Anneliese A. Singh



Learn more about the history of racism in our country, and what it means to be an anti-racist

Being anti-racist means that we become aware of racism and take actions to end racial inequities in our daily lives. Being anti-racist also means actively confronting and working to disrupt the racist policies and systems that surround us. Learning more about how racism operates in our country helps us confront racism within ourselves.

Resources on what it means to become an anti-racist and how racism operates in our country:

- “How to Be an Anti-racist” by Ibram X. Kendi
- “[An Anti-racist Reading List](#), compiled” by Ibram X. Kendi for The New York Times
- “[Code Switch](#),” a podcast by NPR
- “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness” by Michelle Alexander
- “An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States” by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
- “America is for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States” by Erika Lee



Seek out media created by Black, Indigenous and people of color

What we watch, read and listen to plays a critical role in either perpetuating or challenging racism. All too often, Black, Indigenous and people of color are invisible in mainstream media or reduced to racist stereotypes. It is critical to seek out media that not only challenges prejudices and stereotypes but amplifies the voices of BIPOC.

News outlets created and owned by BIPOC journalists:

- [ColorLines](#)
- [The Root](#)
- [Indian Country Today Media](#)
- [Sahan Journal](#)
- [MN Spokesman Recorder](#)
- [The Circle](#)
- [Hmong Times](#)
- [Palabra](#)
- [Latin America New Dispatch](#)

Sources:

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