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A Legacy of Trauma

16 messages

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Branden Collins <bcoll21@gmail.com>
To: Madeline Moore <madelineberry.moore@gmail.com>

In the wake of recent events on the national and international stage, I feel compelled to write to you to provide more context to the frustration, fear, anger, sadness, anxiety and indifference associated with those events that effect me (and more indirectly, you) on a personal level. I feel compelled to write to you, to extend myself to you because I care deeply about you as a friend and someone I cherish as a part of my life, my growth as a person. I feel compelled to write to you because I want to share myself with you in a way that I feel I can more effectively express my concerns and the concerns of so many like me, people of color and otherwise. I want to share with you because I feel that as a person of color it's often times difficult to frame all of the complex emotions that come with identifying as such. I want to share with you because I recognize that for people who are not of color but would consider themselves allies to people of color, it can be difficult to empathize or even discuss issues of race. It is difficult, but it is important. I want to be able to have open, honest conversations with you as someone that I care about genuinely and conversations of race, although difficult, should not be taken as personal attacks because they are not. I come to you without ego, without accusation, eager to speak genuine conversation. If you have more questions after this, please don't hesitate to email or call or text or chat, any form of communication.

BE WARNED, this is an EXTREMELY DENSE email of things that I have compiled over the course of several months of researching. I am, as a person of color, constantly learning and sifting through the depths of my own histories and story, challenging myself to gain a better understanding of who I am and the complexities of the world in which we live. I urge you to browse through this and then hold on to it to use as a point of reference in the future for your own understanding. I'm by no means a moralist. I have my own questions and qualms with commonly accepted ideals and morality (this often make is hard to even find common ground with many other poc, which leads to its own levels of isolation, but I'll save that for another conversation). I'm not here to police your words or actions, but I do want to open up dialogue and to more questions about the society in which we live. These are things that I deal with every moment of every day although I may not always consciously think about them or vocalize them.

Trust me, this isn't an easy thing to talk about>>>>>>

J.Hill @hillmore 57m
@WhiteBlackPrivilege Finding that perfect balance of assertiveness to not get walked over, but docile enough not to be seen as militant.
Retweeted by Allison and 2 others

Racism

First I think it's important to understand what racism is.
Short version: Racism = racial prejudice + power to exert that racial prejudice.
Racism describes a system of oppression based on racial prejudices. This system of oppression is exerted upon people of color, which is an overarching term to describe anyone who identifies as non-white. People of color cannot be racist because they don't benefit from a system that overwhelmingly oppresses them.
Poc can discriminate against you, they can be prejudiced against you, but they can not be racist because we don't live in a system that overwhelmingly oppresses non-poc.
I'm using poc interchangeably with Black wherever you see it in this email, and although most of the information does apply to other races that fall under the term poc, I can only speak from the perspective of a Black man living in America.
Here is a slightly longer definition of racism and how it works.
Here is an even longer version. <I've found this to be a very handy guide. And a full on breakdown.
Another guide to help specifically with conversations about race.
WARNING, not all of your buddies will be ready to openly discuss matters of race and privilege. Be ready to be disappointed.
A few quick questions to ask yourself when thinking about how deeply rooted structural racism is:
How many of your favorite or most recently watched movies/shows feature an all-black, mostly-black cast or black character in the leading role? Next time you go to the movies, look at how many trailers feature this.
Name 5 Black superheroes... quickly.
When you think about important achievements in history, how many people come to mind that are Black vs. White?
When you think of Africa, what comes to mind? What comes to mind when you think of Europe?

Privilege

Privilege simply means that because of who you are, you have inherited benefits that others have a harder time or an impossibility of obtaining in our society. We can recognize that in our society, there are certain privileges that come with being a man vs. being a woman. We can understand that there are certain privileges that come with being in one economic or class bracket vs. another, heterosexual vs. LGBT, etc. The same goes for race.
Does this mean that no white people experience hardship? NO.
It just means that there isn't an entire system revolved around making life more challenging on top of all of the regular challenges of life.
One of the most pervasive aspects of privilege is that privileged persons are usually oblivious to their privilege and have a skewed perception of the society in which they live because of this. More on privilege.

60% OF WORKING-CLASS WHITE AMERICANS BELIEVE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WHITES IS AS BIG A PROBLEM AS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MINORITIES.

"Not every white person is a racist, but the genius of racism is that you don't have to participate to enjoy the spoils. If you're white, you can be completely oblivious, passively accepting the status quo, and reap the rewards."
— Mychal Denzel Smith, *White People Have to Give Up Racism* (via

Internalized Racism

The poison of racism seeping into the psyches of people of color, until people of color believe about themselves what whites believe about them -- that they are inferior to whites. The behavior of one person of color toward another that stems from this psychic poisoning. Often called "intra-racial hostility," and the acceptance by persons of color of Eurocentric values. I see this a lot, and it might be the most frustrating (I have a cousin who's proclaimed that he doesn't and will never date black girls 😞). It's something I'm guilty of and am constantly dealing with & conflicted about.

Ferguson

There are many many many reasons why events in Ferguson have resulted in such an uprising in our country and attention the world over. I will try to outline a few here.
1. This happens more than you think. The shooting of unarmed Mike Brown by officer Darren Wilson isn't the first incident of it's kind recently. It is actually estimated that a poc (Black man) is killed every 28 hours by an officer of the law, and it's speculated that this estimation may even fall short of the reality. This might be an astonishing statistic that's a bit hard to believe but this actually just happened again a few days ago. There's an even more disheartening tale for Black women killed by officers, who often don't even make the headlines.
There were at least 313 killings of Black people by some form of law officer in 2012 alone. Here is a document outlining that and more in-depth details regarding the implications & historical context of this.
"But all police aren't like that!" I know that, but ultimately...
"But what if the cop were Black???" See: internalized racism.
2. Something's fishy. The details of this incident have been highly scrutinized, and for good reason.
Racial makeup of Ferguson
Inconsistencies in testimony & evidence
More
Looking at the photos of officer Darren Wilson's injuries, who claims he "leaved for his life" and was beaten nearly unconscious kind of feel like being at the butt of a big joke.
Support Darren Wilson fundraiser raises \$500,000
Darren Wilson was paid for an ABC interview, upwards of 6 figures. Estimates are as high as \$400,000
The decision made by the grand jury was whether or not to indict Darren Wilson, not whether or not he was guilty of a crime. This means what they were deciding is whether or not details were questionable enough to take this to a full trial. Typically the prosecuting attorney does a cross-examination and presses for an indictment, it's their job. But apparently this job wasn't very well.
How hard it is to NOT indict someone - "According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. attorneys prosecuted 162,000 federal cases in 2010, the most recent year for which we have data. Grand juries declined to return an indictment in 11 of them."
3. U.S. History of racist policy, perception and practice
"Short: White Europeans decided to colonize the rest of the world. They enslaved, massacred, segregated, displaced, tortured, disenfranchised, and raped other racial groups. They stole land, resources, and art. They put other races in zoos and death camps. They destroyed written and pictorial history. They suppressed the religions of other races. They dehumanized us. They refused to teach the history of these atrocities in their schools. They refused to acknowledge the achievements of other races. They used the theory of their racial superiority as their excuse. All social institutions reflect this history. All affected racial groups are still feeling the aftereffects of this."
The long answer is very deep and extremely complex. But put simply, America is a country that was founded on the destruction and exploitation of poc and from that foundation grew a system who's roots are still deeply embedded. This has resulted in a complex web of structural oppression that is still very existent and living in every aspect of our society. Poc have a long history of reasons not to trust the system in which we try to live and work everyday.
A few ex. for historical context:
Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment
The Pruitt Igoe Myth - A documentary about the failing of a massive, low-income housing project in St. Louis and the detrimental effect it had on the Black community attempting to transition from rural work in the South to better-paying jobs in St. Louis & cities like it.
Something to think about in context to other major cities (like Cleveland, my hometown) around the nation. Highly recommended.
Eugenics
There are many many many many examples. Including the distribution of crack cocaine by the government into low-income, urban, minority communities... which it turns out is more than just a mere conspiracy theory, especially in context to the strategies of european colonialist expansion.
4. Which results in a history of mistrust. One of the results of this complex history is a deeply rooted mistrust. A mistrust that effects all races, but is especially detrimental to poc. It's clear, at least to me, that this is an insecurity that the media plays on in order to profit (after all you used to be able to buy postcards of lynching photographs) and (maybe inadvertently...doubt it) divide people which makes it all the more frustrating especially when many of the conversations had aren't constructive.
It's the divide and conquer rhetoric and it isn't a new phenomenon. The dynamic of overseer and slave provides a little context into the greater scheme of the dynamic in today's society, racially, economically and otherwise.
The overseer was typically a white man of lower class/economic standing than the master and was responsible for the productivity of the plantation for maximum profit by any means necessary. Think about this history of simple division in the greater context of modern economics, social structures & politics (there's a direct relationship between democratic & republican bipartisanship here).

"A rich guy, a white guy and a black guy sit down at a table together. There's a plate of 12 cookies, the rich guy grabs 11 of them and says to the white guy "watch out, that black guy's trying to steal your cookie". "
— The link between class & race and how racial resentment has been used to divide the middle and working class in the U.S (via @aetaj)

1 and poc are targeted more by the justice system.

Often times to feed prison systems that are for-profit under the guise of other law enforcement campaigns.

The guilty until proven innocent label of poc and racial profiling as individual prejudice, biased profiling by the media or profiling as policy

More on profiling: NYPD Officer's Secret Taping Reveals Superior Ordered Him To Stop And Frisk Black Males Ages 14-21

With all this profiling weighing on the identity of every poc, the "walk this way, dress this way, act this way around police and it won't happen" argument doesn't really fly. If anything poc have to teach their children the protocols of dealing with police even MORE than their white counterparts. Most of the time, though there's a part of us that understands that it doesn't really matter how you act if the officer has made a decision that you're a threat. We're trying to prepare for a war that we're not equipped to deal with.

4. Unfair treatment for similar crimes/response to protest.

A

B

C

"The message of all of this was something beyond the mere maintenance of law and order: it's difficult to imagine how armored officers with what looked like a mobile military sniper's nest could quell the anxieties of a community outraged by allegations regarding the excessive use of force. It revealed itself as a raw matter of public intimidation."
— Jelani Cobb reports from Ferguson (via newyorker)

5. **Lack of empathy.** A failure of empathy perpetuates racial disparities. Studies indicate that there is a racial bias associated with the perception of pain, in that people, including medical personnel, assume black people feel less pain than white people (a result of structural racism & it's tendency to dehumanize poc). Something that can be seen first hand in the case of [Eric Garner, a 400 pound asthmatic man who was killed when police officers applied a chokehold to him](#). In the video, you can hear an officer say "he's alright", when he clearly... wasn't.

Further Implications/Connections

It's clear to me that this issue reaches far beyond a single incident and relates on some level or another to other complex issues within our society. Every issue that is a concern for you and I in today's world is connected to every other issue. It's really that simple and clear to me as complex as it is to dig through.

If you care about [women's rights](#), you should care about the rights of poc.
If you care about [net neutrality](#), you should care about the rights of poc.
If you care about [LGBT rights](#), you should care about the rights of poc.
If you care about [economic equality](#), you should care about the rights of poc.
If you care about [climate change](#), you should care about the rights of poc.
If you care about [education](#), you should care about the rights of poc. This is especially frustrating as our history has been altered, [hidden](#) and [omitted over](#) and over again... and it's still happening. It's frustrating to know [this](#) and see [this](#).
If you care about [how our society deals with mental health](#), you should care about the rights of poc.
If you care about [scientific literacy](#), you should care about the rights of poc.

e t c

“When feminism does not explicitly oppose racism, and when antiracism does not incorporate opposition to patriarchy, race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other and both interests lose.”

— [Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw](#) (via [androphilia](#))

But 2 wrongs don't make a right / why the riots / violence isn't the answer / What would MLK do, etc etc

If we think about the dark histories in our nation and on a global scale, what we start to see forming is a sort of psychology of a society forming. If we can understand that societies & [cities can have an emotional state](#), imagine poc in America as ONE individual, that individual suffering trauma after trauma in a situation from which there isn't a clear escape. As my friend Meneux very eloquently put it, "The surprised are called naive, the numb are called passive, the angry are called destructive...there is no correct response to trauma."

[More context on this thought, spec. related to crime/war on drugs](#)

[Angela Davis on violence from the Black Power Mixtape](#), a great documentary about the rise and fall (i.e. dismantling by the government) of the Black Panthers.

[This frustration summed up more quickly by Tupac](#):

And [MLK](#) who, upon doing further research you'd find wasn't as confident about his pacifist ways and actually began siding more closely with the ideologies of more militant activists like [Malcolm X](#).

Further, similar statements like "remain peaceful" & the regard for property above the real issues at hand have been made by our president, who although is a Black man, is deeply embedded in this system based on racial injustice. I wonder why?

Saying there's never an ending (there's no [innocent Pakistan civilians](#))? Heres... politics confuse me. Just because we have a Black president (overseer) doesn't mean structural racism is gone.

A very poignant statement was made that [savesy never truly disappeared in America](#). It simply evolved. This statement is truth. With that said, our tactics as poc and allies must evolve to match the machine of structural racism and eradicate it. I do not think boycotting, protesting, rioting etc., will work any longer, at least not alone. I believe that we need [bigger ideas](#) and I think they are happening right now.

Solutions

The fact that we live in a world where there are [\(white\) people in St. Louis who don't even know who Mike Brown is](#) let alone why they should care about any of this..... means that there are likely no true solutions at least none that we will see make a large impact in our lifetimes.

I personally have no idea what the solutions are but it takes a long long time for significant cultural/societal changes to take place. I do not believe that changes in laws or policy can effect the sort of dynamic change I'm looking for.

The implications of structural racism are [everywhere](#), from the subtle to the [outright obvious](#), there is no escape from it. To me it is a question of altering the value systems that we uphold in our society, this comes with education (not simply education reform with policy bhw) with people becoming more aware of themselves as individuals and how we connect on a larger scale as a community. These changes come either with the immensely long process of evolution as a society or with the collapse of the civilization in which we exist.

The situation for me, combined with all of the other oppressive systems we're required to exist within, does seem somewhat hopeless at times: :::::

"I want to set forth this proposition, which will be easier to reject than refute: Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance."

—Derrick Bell, "Faces at the Bottom of the Well", p.12, 1992

On a planet that increasingly resembles one huge Maximum Security prison, the only intelligent choice is to plan a jail break.
—Robert Anton Wilson

"The feelings that hurt most, the emotions that sting most, are those that are absurd - The longing for impossible things, precisely because they are impossible; nostalgia for what never was; the desire for what could have been; regret over not being someone else; dissatisfaction with the world's existence. All these half-tones of the soul's consciousness create in us a painful landscape, an eternal sunset of what we are."
— Fernando Pessoa

"The system has to fail, and people have to lose confidence in their elected leaders. That will be a major turning point... The trends now indicate that our country is going bankrupt. The probability is, our country will move toward a military dictatorship to prevent riots and complete social breakdown."

- Jacques Fresco

"Democracy is a con game. It's a word invented to placate people to make them accept a given institution. All institutions sing, 'We are free.' The minute you hear 'freedom' and 'democracy', watch out.... because in a truly free nation, no one has to tell you you're free." -
Jacque Fresco

“When law and morality contradict each other, the citizen has the cruel alternative of either losing his moral sense or losing his respect for the law.”

— Frédéric Bastiat (via [moralanarchism](#))

"This society is going to become more supremely racist when it is apparently not racist. And that's where it's moving to at this point. When a white man tells you, "let's not put race into this," he is being the most racist at that point.

You can have a society that removes all public expression on racism. You can have a society where people no longer overtly express racial hatred, and racist statements and behavior is outlawed, but you can still have a system that destroys millions and millions of Black people. Colin Powell and others are the signs of that kind of racism where the Black middle class will be sitting in these jobs and positions defending the system.

You must recognize that racism is not an attitude. It is not a feeling of hatred toward another people. You must understand that racism and white supremacy is in the very structures and values of the institutions of the society itself. And until you revolve and change those structures and attitudes and values you will always be under the bottom."

— Dr. Amos N. Wilson explaining racism and predicting the future almost twenty years ago (early 90's).

But, people are [doing things](#) to try to make a difference, and by trying to educate myself and those close to me I hope to be some part of that small difference. I for one feel that it's important too look at the connection between things in order to not only make them relevant to the most people possible but in order to look at things in a more holistic, realistic way. We are now beginning to really feel the implications of that reality, the reality that the world is an integrated system, with the actions of one part of the system effecting every other. Climate change effects the economy effects racial/social equality effects public health effects individual psychology, etc. etc. We are on the cusp of a dramatic paradigm shift and [what we're seeing the world over](#) are the growing pains of this shift. I think what we're beginning to see is an era of The people of planet earth vs. their governments.

Evolution is a slow process defined by the accumulation of incremental changes resulting in a large overall change. I think we can be a part of that change if we work together, if by doing nothing more than simply opening our eyes. Hopefully this can act as a resource that you can come back to and reference in order to gain more understanding about these types of issues. Use it for yourself, share it with others (white and non-white) to start conversations.

ok.

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Brandon Collins <bcoll21@gmail.com> To: Alexis Wheat <awheat@rocketmail.com>	Wed, Nov 26, 2014 at 7:44 PM
Below is a message I sent to some of my white friends. Thought you might find it helpful not only for any white friends you might have but for yourself and other black folk.	
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