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White Privilege Exists

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White privilege.

I made it through the majority of my life never hearing these two words. Growing up in Indiana, white is mostly what I saw, learned about, and followed. The country seemed to be constructed for people who looked like me. I had so much white privilege that I could opt of realizing my white privilege. It was this protective bubble that blinded me from the ugly truth of the real world: In most cases, I was deemed more valuable and worthy because of my skin tone.

Here is what I know now. White privilege is real, and those of us who have it have no idea it’s even happening. White privilege is seeing people who look exactly like you on almost every single TV show, movie and commercial yet having the audacity to ask why there is BET because “that’s racist.” The majority of African Americans, Hispanics, or anyone of a different hue than white, if they make prime time TV or motion pictures, are cast in stereotypical roles created by white America. They play these parts to perpetuate and to keep safe our skewed view of who we think they truly are. Even more damaging, white privilege is ignoring this is happening in schools across our country. Ask today’s students to name leaders, authors or other figures outside of the white race they learn about. Most will struggle. The fact many of my students don’t know who Maya Angelou and John Lewis are is tragic.

White privilege is the fact that I’ll get the benefit of the doubt because of my skin color. No one will lock doors when I walk by, and I certainly won’t be followed around a store. We get to claim there is equality because Jim Crow is dead even when we see and hear about blatant racial inequities. White privilege is blaming mental illness when someone who looks like me commits heinous crimes but hanging labels on everyone else.

White America doesn’t want to talk about it because it induces shame and guilt. I get that, and I am not one to welcome those emotions, but this violent divide between the people of our country will remain until we have the uncomfortable, hard conversations. We have to listen to the those who walk the same streets as us but live a different life. Not only do we need to listen, but we must honor that as their truth, not some made up story. We expect our truth to be believed, and we need to do the same.

I am not out to vilify white America because the majority is empathetic and kind, but we have to call a spade a spade and quit denying we have it better because of our skin color. We can’t call the Black Lives Matter movement a terrorist group or inherently racist when we have zero conception of what it feels like to be a disposable race. When one person suffers, we all suffer.

Now, I will never tell anyone who to vote for in the upcoming election, but I want to bring up this point. For the majority of white America, we will be fine with whoever wins. Our values, history and desires are normally paramount in political decision making; however, please realize that is not the case for everyone else. They aren’t represented, considered or respected in many instances, and white privilege gives us the option to look past that fact. It’s saying, “Well, my family and I will be fine, and that’s really all that matters.” That not only is egregiously apathetic, it’s profoundly dangerous. We’re not the ones who have been tagged with the labels as thugs, rapists, terrorists, and the reason that this country isn’t “great,” but we should never ever allow that to be used to classify a group of people because it’s that very act that is ripping the country apart. America was built on the principle that we fight for each other, not with each other.

The way to end white privilege is to first acknowledge that it exists. No, our generations did not create it, but we’re no better if we keep perpetuating it. The only privilege we should all feel is that we can say we get to live in this great country. Like John Wooden told his All-American basketball stars, “You’re no better, but you’re just as good.”