



Staff Town Hall

13 August 2020 / 2:00PM / Zoom Meeting

Updates

Announcements

- As we continue our Black Lives Matter series for this Summer, we welcome Dr. Tim Wise who will be speaking about how to be an Anti-Racist and White Fragility.
- Tim Wise is a well-known and respected author and speaker. Since 1995 he has given speeches at over 600 college campuses across the United States. He has trained teachers, corporate employees, nonprofit organizations, and law enforcement officers in methods for addressing and dismantling racism in their institution. Tim is an Anti-Racist activist and author of seven books on racism inequality and white privilege.

Current Climate

- We are in arguably the biggest racially motivated movement in our country, this is reaching large small and diverse communities around the world.
- We've seen these scenarios before, in reference to George Floyd, that have not led to this level of resistance.
- This is largely because of COVID-19, our everyday lives are not as busy and people are more focused on the news and their surroundings.
- We need to make sure that this movement is sustained, and more importantly that the role of white ally ship sustain itself in the right ways.
- White fragility and White denial danger the sustainability of the current movement and will continue to hinder any chances of real change until they are resolved.

Short History on White Denial/Fragility

- In the 60's white folks were polled by Gallup and asked do they think that black and white people are being treated equally. 2 out of 3 white people said that yes, they believed black people are treated equally to their white counterparts.
- White people were also polled and asked if black children had the same chance to get an equal education as white children, again they answered yes.

- It important to note that this was at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, where we also had video of horrific racial violence, the white people of that time didn't think there was any problem.
- Now, looking back white people will now say that the treatment of black folk was bad. But in the present, when it was all happening, and when acknowledging the problem would have put white folks on the hook to actually do something about it, most white people continued to claim that they did not see anything wrong with the racial climate.
- This shows that even at the height of racism and oppression, white folks still say they don't see a problem. That's the precedent that we're dealing with in today's climate.
- We cannot forget this portion of history that proved that it is easy for white people to not see what's right in front of them. This could result in us overestimating the ability of white ally ship at this moment.

How to deal with white fragility

- Why are these things such problems?
 1. There are **material benefits** for white people to not see this as an issue. If they acknowledge the unfairness of our society, they put their advantages at risk
 2. **Physiological interest** in not seeing this. Our society is taught that wherever you end up in America is a result of your own work ethic, people who aren't successful should have worked harder. If you're taught that, you can easier rationalize inequality. You have a psychological desire to believe that you live in the place you learned about as a child.
 - For example, in school we are taught about how Thomas Jefferson said 'All men are created equal, endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these, life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.'
 - If you're black/brown, you know that Thomas Jefferson owned slaves while we said this, so he did not mean those words
 - However, if you're white, you have the ability to buy into that belief
 - The good news is, most people are and want to be good people, but the problem is that if one sees evidence that people are being oppressed but they are in some way benefiting from that or implicated in that, a person's psychological defense mechanism is to ignore it. So, one has to be aware of that.

How to be Anti-Racist

- How do we ensure white people either join the struggle or at the very least not be an obstacle/barrier to the movement?
- We can't guilt or shame white people into helping with the BLM Movement.
 - Self-loathing from white people doesn't help, it's a form of fragility in itself because it shifts the energy back to white folks.

- Moral indignation doesn't work either, we can be indignant about something and feel morally righteous, but that is not necessarily sustainable.
- How do we keep white folks engaged in the movement?
 - White people need to recognize that fighting against racial injustice is not charity work
 - The “I'm here to help you and support you” is a charitable impulse
 - That's not solidarity and it's not sustainable. Whites needs to recognize that white supremacy and inequality compromises white lives as well
 - That's the irony we don't realize, when the system allows for black and brown lives to be devalued, it's just a matter of time until white lives are devalued.
 - The same mentality that says black and brown people don't matter as much is the same mentality that says sick, working class, poor, and elderly people don't matter as much and this will eventually result in the loss of white lives as well.
 - It's not about how white people can help black and brown, it's about how white folks are going to liberate themselves from what white fragility/denial/defensiveness obliviousness and supremacy have done and the minute we internalize that mentality is the minute that we become truly dangerous to the system because that's the moment when we see we have an interest in change

Example One - Opioid Epidemic

- There is an opioid epidemic in America right now that disproportionately affects White America
- One of the reasons for this is that our society has treated the drug issue as crime issue and not a public health issue, so when black and brown people were being disproportionately affected in the crack and heroin epidemics, we as a society just locked them up and threw away the key rather than put money in treatment and rehab
- Now we have millions of white families looking for rehab and treatment for opioids and they do not understand why they cannot get help
- This is a direct result of white people voting for candidates that were sending black and brown people to jail for drug charges and the system has come back around full circle
- When white people indulge in racist inequality for too long, it ultimately devalues even the lives of millions of white people

Example Two - Affordable Comprehensive Universal Health Care

- One of the primary reasons that we don't have better safety net program including Health Care is because of a widespread belief of large numbers of white Americans that if we have those programs, black and brown people will take advantage of them.
- The irony is that then white people don't have the program either, and that we need to have healthier communities and healthier families as well

- The idea in itself that one can “take advantage of” a health care system is bizarre because people want to be healthy, no one is purposely getting sick to be able to go to the doctor.

Example Three - Gun Laws

- Jonathan Metzler, author of *Dying of Whiteness*, conducted research on guns and suicide, health care, and schooling in Missouri, Kansas, and Tennessee.
- In Missouri he found that there was an increase of suicide by gun of white men
 - It's important to note that 90% of all gun suicides in America are committed by white men
- Missouri had recently loosened their gun registration laws due to a growing fear against crime, which they admittedly perceive will be committed by black and brown folk. This was a response to the Ferguson uprising.
- Contrary to their beliefs, there was no increase in crime in these neighborhoods, however white people went and purchased all of these weapons which resulted in an increase of suicides
- So again, the fear of the ‘others’ which is something that perpetuates racism and racial inequity ends up leading to policies that end up endangering millions of white folks as well

Example Four - COVID-19

- If we were in the middle of a pandemic where a virus was disproportionately killing white, young, and healthy people, we would have responded much differently
- When the data came out that showed that the virus disproportionately affected black and brown, working class, older, and sick people, all of a sudden there was a growing notion amongst white folks that this might be tyranny and we should open back up the economy
- The irony is, the majority of people dying are still white folks, because they are the majority in the country.

Q&A

Q: Where do you recommend someone begin if we wanted to educate ourselves using the things that you've done but also other sources as well? There's so much to unpack here, where to start?

A: I think the best place to start is at the source of the wisdom, including the source of a lot of my own wisdom, which is black and brown wisdom. I would recommend Carol Anderson's book *White rage*. It's packed with information about the history of how every step forward and not in the struggle for racial justice, has been met for hundreds of years with this kind of push back is kind of white rage and backlash. For example,

Trumpism and the times we're living in now was predictable if you understand Carol's book, because it comes as backlash from having Obama in office. This is just like there was backlash against affirmative action after the Civil Rights Movement, segregation in Brown vs. Board, etc. This was also manifested against brown folks with the expulsion of 600,000 Mexican American citizens during the Great Depression. Another great book is *How to be an Anti-Racist*. Start with those volumes and proceed from there.

Q: I think what I've learned and I'm still learning as a white male is humility, and that I need to be able to step back and let other black and brown folks/women step forward. I need to listen and also interrogate myself as to what are the racist stereotypes that come up in my mind. Can you speak on that?

A: I think we live in a culture that does not engender a lot of humility particularly in white men of middle class or above status and additionally if you're straight and cisgendered and able bodied. If you add up certain things you start to realize that humility is like the opposite of whatever it is so it's hard but it's an important thing you're absolutely right. There's a time for stepping back and a time for stepping forward, and we need to understand the context of each of these. A time to step back for example would be at rallies, strategizing sessions and organizing meetings. A time to step up would be in our homes, communities, social networks, any spaces that we are in that disproportionately tend to be mostly other white people.

Q: The sustainability police, the self-help, how do I as an African American woman with not one white friend but many white friends, frame the sustainability police as not charity work, but more self-help work, without them being offended or looking at it as a mental a mental or healing process?

A: Well I think it's about asking white folks to consider not only what they gain from the system, but on the flipside, what is it that they lose from the system. And what do they put at risk in order to gain access to those advantages, what is the cost of accessing that privilege? What is the cost in the quality of our schools, the quality of our healthcare? What is the cost right now in this COVID-19 pandemic? Back to the COVID-19 example, yes black and brown people are disproportionately affected, but again hundreds of thousands of white people will die as a result of that. And a result of the neglect of a proper health care system for people of color and poor people, will contribute to COVID-19 killing lots of white people.

Q: If the United States is so racist, how do you explain the fact that this country elected a Black Man as the President of the United States?

A: Benazir Bhutto was elected as a Prime Minister twice in Pakistan and was also later assassinated. I don't think anyone would say that means that there's no sexism in Pakistan or that patriarchy isn't a problem there. Individuals of marginalized groups can be successful and attain power and yet the larger systemic problem can remain. For example, about 25% of white people who said they were going to vote for Obama acknowledged that they still held negative views about black folks in general but were making an exception for Barack Obama. If someone is making an exception for one

black person, that is still racist because that person is still viewing the majority of black people negatively.

Q: A majority of academic studies have shown that children provided the opportunity to access an excellent k-12 education will have a greater possibility to achieve future success as an adult. Being tracked and failing public schools is a concrete example of systemic racism. Wouldn't giving children and their parents the opportunity of school choice provides a long-term solution to racial disparities?

A: Well there's a lot of mixed data on the value of school choice programs, it very much depends on what you're talking about. There are currently a lot of school choices in a lot of districts in the country and we don't see a significant boost in achievement. What we do know about school choice is that it becomes an easy way out rather than doing what we could be doing, which is ensuring that all schools are excellent and that all schools have the necessary resources. We know that when schools have sufficient resources and a curriculum that is geared and relevant to their students, those students do well. When we engage the community fully, those students will do well. But what we tend to do is enforce a system that was set up for the purpose of maintaining inequality, and not ending the idea that public schools were created with the idea of equalizing things because that just isn't true. For example, we continue to use standardized tests on students, but we don't give them the same curriculum, we don't find their schools the same, and don't train their teachers the same. Then we are surprised when unequal resources lead to unequal results. So, that the school "choice" is not going to make anything better if the choices that are being given are choices between one school that has resources and another that doesn't. All you are doing is cherry picking and allowing a handful of kids to escape this bad school and maybe go to a better one. Meanwhile what happens to all those other kids who are not able to choose a different school?

Q: Can you comment about the stark differences between the Democratic party, who just nominated a black woman as VP and that had a black president, and then the Republican party of Trump that has become the party of white people. What are the implications moving forward if, particularly white folks, see themselves as more alt right?

A: Right now, there is no question that the Republican Party under Trump has gone in as a party of white grievances, as a party of white resentment, and as a party that wants to limit the number of votes being cast by black and brown people. There is no other reason why their administration would be cutting back on early voting and trying to defund the post office to stop mail in voting. It's important to note that older white folks and white business people have been voting by mail for years and no one ever questioned that those votes would lead to massive fraud, but all of a sudden, they are saying that there will be massive levels of fraud because they do not want everyone to be able to vote them out. There have been examples of republican politicians admitting to using dog whistle politics to target black and brown people. So although we know that the Democratic Party has its own negative history, there is very little question which of these two parties right now is looking at the interest of black and brown people and defending them, and which of these parties is locking brown kids up at the

border, trying to keep black and brown people from voting, and trying to roll back those Civil Rights protections that were fought for by people like John Lewis who knew exactly why he was in the Democratic Party.

Q: How do you address someone who is a white male in the middle upper class, who says they feel they are not the privileged class, rather people of color have more privileges? How do you get them to get it?

A: It seems to me that privilege leads to certain outcomes by definition so if you have a group that's privileged you would look at unemployment data, poverty data, Health outcomes, education outcomes, criminal justice outcomes and you would expect that whoever has the most advantage to be doing better in all of those areas. The folks that are disadvantaged would be doing the worst in those areas. So, to say that black folks have the advantage when there's not a single category in which black and brown people are doing even equal to white people, let alone better, and in every category white folk are doing better seems a bit disingenuous. You have white folks who are working and middle class doing better than black and brown folks who are upper middle class. So not only is there significant privilege, but it extends even to white folks who aren't that wealthy. Now don't get me wrong, there are millions of white folks who are struggling because of the system of inequality, but again the reason is because we don't have Universal Affordable Health Care, because we don't want to have programs that black people will "abuse" the system. As a result, white people end up cutting off their nose to spite their face. White people need to realize that a part of why they are hurting and don't have more financial security and need better and affordable healthcare, is because we live in a society of radicalized disparity. If we closed those disparities and actually made it so that everyone had access to those things, white people would be better off as well.