

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT RACISM

Is that racist? Am I a racist? What, if anything, is reverse racism?

“Racism” and “racist” are common terms. Not too long ago, racism was unapologetically embraced by the nation’s leaders and most of its population. We remember watching Alabama Governor George Wallace on TV as he proclaimed in his inauguration speech on January 14, 1963, to a cheering crowd, “Segregation now, segregation forever.”¹ Now, almost no one wants to be called or considered a racist. Donald Trump, despite his public actions, declares himself “the least racist person.” Ignoring or being oblivious to racism is obviously damaging. It is also problematic to be paralyzed by the epithet of being called a racist. By neither ignoring nor cowering from the label of racist, we move toward antiracism. And in focusing endlessly on racism as personal, these discussions move us away from some hard work and the focus on racism as a historical and present-day system.

In chapter 1, we outlined the history of the cocreation of race and racism. The preposterous idea of biological races was needed to justify what philosopher Charles Mills² calls the “racial contract” and what Isabel Wilkerson refers to as a U.S. caste system.³ Racism results from the operation of a caste system or levels of closeness to God, the old Great Chain of Being. In this chapter, we move to the present and provide you with basic definitions that help to differentiate among some crucially important but commonly confused terms. We break down the difference between prejudice and racism

as well as forms of racism, such as racist actions and thoughts, individual and institutional racism, and how they all connect into a system. We provide clear and concrete examples to help you recognize when ideas and behaviors are racist and when they are not, as well as how individual racist thoughts and behaviors relate to systemic and structural levels of racism.

To be sure, racism is in the ideological air we breathe. We end with a discussion of white supremacy and data showing the persistence of racism and racial inequalities. It is time for all of us to look in the mirror, take on racism, and move together toward antiracism.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES AMONG THE TERMS “BIGOTRY,” “BIAS,” “PREJUDICE,” “XENOPHOBIA,” “ETHNOCENTRISM,” AND “RACISM”? HOW ARE THEY DEFINED AND CONNECTED?

These terms are interrelated and have overlapping meanings. *Bigotry* refers to intolerance of any belief or opinion that differs from one’s own. For example, one can be a religious bigot. One can be aware of one’s own bigotry, or it can be unconscious. *Prejudice*, related to bigotry, refers to an opinion against a group that is typically based on preconceived notions rather than actual experience or reason. It is a preconceived notion that can result from the elementary, logical fallacies of composition and division. The fallacy of composition results when one takes the characteristics of an individual and then infers that all members of a group have that characteristic. The fallacy of division takes a statistical characteristic of a group and infers that all members of the group have that characteristic.⁴

Bias is similar to prejudice and bigotry but slightly more inclusive: it refers to beliefs and actions for or against any object, thing, person, or group compared with another based on preconceived notions. One can also be biased toward an explanation or mode of thinking, and reckoning with such biases is also of great importance. We all have biases and preconceived notions that act as shortcuts. That is, because our biases result from the fact that our brains were produced by natural selection (descent with modification), and many of them are predictable.⁵ That is why when we think we’ve seen something before, our tendency is to take a shortcut to explanation. Guarding against bias is important in science as well as in daily life. One might have a bias toward simple and genetic explanations for racial inequalities in health. These are very common in our culture. Most people prefer simple, genetic explanations for biology and behavior.⁶

Finally, biases might be conscious and explicit. We are aware of our biases. Alan's favorite basketball player is Jaylen Brown of the Boston Celtics. Joe's favorite is LeBron James. Both Alan and Joe love spaghetti and meatballs, one of their favorite suppers as children. But more often, bias is unconscious and implicit. We are not even aware that our brains are pushing us in certain directions because of lessons we learn without thinking of them throughout our lives. When a job applicant is selected over other applicants because he or she has a white-sounding name, that is an implicit bias. The recruiter probably has no idea that he or she is making an unconscious decision based on associations with a name. A great deal of our ideological and personal racism is unconscious or implicit.⁷

Xenophobia is a fear or hatred of others. It appears to be common that some individuals approach those in other groups with some degree of caution. We are, after all, less familiar with the customs and behavior of people in other groups. The Athenians were definitely cultural xenophobes, calling other groups uncivilized or savages, which are xenophobic epithets. Some evolutionary theorists and anthropologists consider fear of strangers (xenophobia) as a sort of hard-wired behavior used for protection of the cultural group. There is evidence for this view, as xenophobia exists in all anthropoid apes (humans, chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans) and therefore might have originated in their common ancestor.⁸ But make no mistake: even if xenophobia might have some support based on evolution, it is not inevitable, and it certainly is not an explanation for racism. If anything, xenophobia has been used as an excuse for institutional racism. Finally, there is just as much evidence from evolution for the desire of others and the evolutionary importance of exogamy, mating outside one's group.

Xenophobia also lapses into *ethnocentrism*, a preference for one's own culture and the evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions derived from one's own. However, humans also seem to have an attraction to others. The other is often seen as exotic and attractive. Although there might be some evolved and genetic basis for xenophobia and ethnocentrism, the specifics are highly cultural. For example, Donald Trump's stated preference for immigrants from Norway or Eastern Europe rather than the Middle East or Mexico is his personal, learned expression of his ethnocentrism and xenophobia.

These ideologies and behaviors intersect with one another, as they all have to do with negative preconceptions and behaviors toward individuals in other groups, whether different genders, social classes, castes, ethnicities,

citizens of other states or countries, or race. These negative perceptions are often unconscious.

Defining Racism

As we discussed in chapter 1, the most common and simple definition of racism is prejudice plus power. This definition highlights that racism is a form of prejudice against people of another socially defined race. However, to be racist requires a power differential or an ability to move the wheels of institutions that have power over individual lives. By this definition, within the contemporary U.S. power structure, a Black or brown person can hold prejudices against a white person, but they have no or limited power to act on their prejudice and to be racist against a white person. By this definition, reverse racism is not a thing (see the later discussion). The cultural legacy of the United States is responsible for the moronic concept of reverse racism. For most of our history, it was normal for whites to unashamedly enact racist policies and laws against Blacks, browns, and reds.

We like the short definition of racism (prejudice plus power) but want to go further and make sure it is clear how racism is linked to the belief in biological races. The “rocket fuel” of racism is the belief that biological races are different, innate, and hierarchically arranged by God and/or evolution. Ibram X. Kendi says that if you believe in biological race, you are a racist.⁹ We would say you are an *ideological* racist or racialist. However, there is a strong correlation between racialism and racism. The belief in innate biological differences can then justify racial differences in wealth and health as just part of those innate differences rather than being attributable to structural and institutional forms of racism. The belief in biological race can become an excuse for racism.

To clarify, there are two intersecting forms of racism. One is more personal and ideological and includes the varied and everyday notions of racial difference and hierarchy. It is what individuals think, consciously or subconsciously, which form patterns of thought and actions that are inherited through history and culture. Kendi says that this is a simple descriptor of “racist.” Most people harbor racist ideas. In the words of Beverly Tatum, we all breathe the ideological smog of racism.¹⁰ However, a primary purpose of this book is to maintain that it is possible to cure oneself of racist ideology. It does take work, however, as so much in our society continues to reify racial thinking and to reward racist behavior.

Personal or individual racism is important because without it, the second and most important form of racism—institutional and structural racism—would lose ideological support. In her bestselling book *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo makes the important point that racism is not about individuals, it is not an action, and it does not require intent. Rather, racism is systemic and institutional.¹¹ We agree that the racism that affects human lives is systemic and institutionalized. And we think DiAngelo would agree with our addition that individual-level racism—especially the worldview of innate, unchanging, and hierarchically arranged biological races—however implicit and buried it might be, is the ideological fuel for institutional racism. That kind of racism in employment, for example, rests on the many managers who, time after time, reject applicants based on Black-sounding names. You might not think you see color, but we all do. Racism is like oxygen in the air we breathe. You might not see it, but science can measure it.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT FORMS OF RACISM?

Yes, racism takes a variety of forms with different central elements. One typology developed by sociologists identifies four prominent, intersecting types: biological racism, symbolic racism, ethnocentrism, and aversive (color-blind) racism. In addition, as noted earlier, racism can be individualized (interpersonal and internalized) and institutional. Racism can also vary in being entirely intentional to entirely unintentional. All of these types of racism intersect and can support one another, so they are all part of a system. They all contribute to suffering and limit human and societal potential.

Biological racism rests on the premise that races exist in the human species and that these races differ in their innate (genetic) capacities. It purports that the social status of these groups results not from discrimination but from their innate capacities. Among these innate capacities are traits such as intelligence, morality, and longevity. Thus, biological racism posited that certain races are more likely to produce criminals than others, providing a handy justification for the preponderance of African American convict laborers in the 1930s and the mass incarceration of African Americans to the present day. In the late nineteenth century, this ideology also predicted that “Negroes” would go extinct due to their lack of “persistence.” Frederick Hoffman predicted, in *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*,¹² that the Negro would become extinct because he was unable to adapt to the rigors of northern cities and American civilization. We believe that biological

racism is the foundational racism, because all the other forms of racism rely on the notion the underlying biological differences exist between racialized groups of human beings.

Symbolic racism is a form of prejudice held by individuals of European descent against those of African descent. Other American ethnic groups also adhere to this belief system, being prejudiced against any group that is different from their own. Symbolic racism is usually described as a coherent system that can be expressed in several beliefs: that individuals of African descent no longer face serious prejudice or discrimination, that their failure to progress results from their unwillingness to work hard enough, that they make excessive demands, and that they have received more help from the government than they deserve.¹³ Symbolic racism feeds into biological racism.

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to evaluate other ethnic groups by the standards of behavior and qualities displayed in one's own ethnic group. Judging standards of beauty by physical traits inherent to one's own ethnic group (hair type and skin color, for instance) is one example. Judging another group's patterns of expression as vulgar, based on how one's own group expresses itself, is another. Ethnocentrism in and of itself is not a form of racism, because it does not always involve a power dynamic. However, ethnocentrism is aligned with symbolic racism, and with the added element of power and belief that differences are innate, it leads to racism.

Cultural racism is the belief that different races have different cultures that lead to particular outcomes, such as better education, more wealth, and a better society. It is an effort to separate from biologizing differences. There are three fundamental problems with the notion of cultural racism. First, it is a sort of oxymoron. As we discuss, a fundamental aspect of race and racism is biologization. Linnaeus was culturally racist, in that he confused cultural and biological traits in his racial classifications, thinking they were all essential to racial types. But today, few have this problem. Second, just as there is no essential whiteness, there is no essential white culture. Cultures, by their very definition, are constantly mixing and changing. Finally, cultures do not form in vacuums. For example, one cannot know or evaluate a health behavior, diet, exercise, and the like without thinking about housing and access to healthy foods. Those things are cultural but also consequences of regional, national, and global flows of people, ideas, and things.

Color-blind or aversive racism is an ideology that allows those of the dominant socially defined race (those of European descent) to claim that racism

is no longer the central factor determining the life chances of people of non-European descent (particularly dark-skinned individuals of African descent). This position argues that instead of the ongoing institutional and individual racism of American society, nonracial factors such as market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and the cultural attitudes of racial/ethnic minorities themselves are the main causal factors of their social subordination. Indeed, recent studies have shown that although there is near universal endorsement of racial equality as a core value, aversive racism persists.

People practicing aversive racist behavior would never describe themselves as racists, but this form of subtle, indirect racism operates across a wide variety of settings, such as in employment, legal decisions, group problem-solving, and everyday helping decisions. An example of an everyday helping decision is whether or not a white person stops to hold a door open for a person who is not white, or which persons someone decides to help, such as when white rather than nonwhite homeless people are given more donations of money or food.

Our culture tends to focus on individual racism, that is, the racism that individuals undertake as actions, behaviors, and underlying racist thoughts and ideas that determine their behavior. Recent studies have found that all humans harbor unconscious stereotypes or implicit biases. When most of us think about racism, we think about individual racism. And, yes, individual racism is important.

The main importance of individual racism is not just in how it impacts one's thoughts and actions but in how it ramps up into institutional racism. When individual ideas become socially agreed "fact," powerful institutions can act to discriminate. Take redlining as an example. It became a widespread practice in the United States to deny loans and housing to families of color, and this practice of redlining led to different capacities for accumulating wealth. Specifically, redlining influenced who was able to receive loans to buy a home. Considering that homeownership has been seen as one of the avenues by which wealth is generated and transmitted to the next generation, redlining explains, more than any other recent racist practice, the difference in wealth between whites and Blacks in the United States.

In 2014, the median household income for whites was \$71,300, compared with \$43,000 for Blacks. The difference is almost the same when we control for education. For college-educated whites, median income was \$106,600 compared with \$82,300 for college-educated Blacks. However, worse than just the household income difference is the disparity in overall wealth, which

includes all assets a family owns, including stocks, bonds, and properties minus outstanding loans and other debts. The median wealth in 2016 was \$13,204 for Blacks and \$149,703 for whites—a ratio of 1 to 11.5—and has not changed since 1968.¹⁴

Finally, it is easy to recognize the violent racism of slave owners and Nazis. If they were the only racists, racism would be a problem that we could more easily isolate. Unfortunately, the ideology of race as biological and hierarchical has permeated society for so long that we hardly notice how pervasive it is. As we've said, it is reified. The doctor who refused to diagnose scleroderma and the physician who failed to give orders for a bone density test (see the introduction) are not overt racists. Rather, they are following their medical training, which is racialized in ways that disempower individuals and communities of color.

Consider the idea of mean and kind racists. Mean racists are those who recognize their hate and intentionally do harm.¹⁵ Kind racists include pretty much everyone else, who might see racism as an evil yet fail to fully recognize the humanity of individuals of different races. Kind racists support mean racists, and both contribute to systemic racism.

WHEN DID RACISM BEGIN?

Racism and race began together. As race evolved from a folk belief to a legal entity to a set of pseudoscientific facts, both institutional and ideological racism became more established. Racism requires race, and biological race provides intellectual cover for racism.

Given that formulation, racism cannot have existed before race. The treatment of Jews throughout medieval Europe and their expulsion from Spain in 1492 are acts that presage racism.¹⁶ These acts were ethnocentric, intolerant, and bigoted. The belief that a Jew will always be a Jew, that Jews cannot change their essential Jewishness, and that Jews differed physically from Christians is close to believing Jews are a distinct race. But these actions certainly are not full-blown racism as at this time Jews were not fully considered to be a race.

The enslavement of Africans and the start of the triangle trade was an indication of the beginning of full-blown racism. Enslaved Africans were thought to be subhuman and of an entirely different type of human. They were commodities that could be enslaved, traded, owned, and put to death. Slavery is an economic system that is supported by the ideology that the

enslaved individual will always be of less value than the slave owner. The enslaved person was either degraded (monogenism; e.g., the mark of Cain or curse of Ham) or created separately (polygenism; e.g., pre-Adamite races).¹⁷

Chattel slavery is often pointed to as the essential form of institutional racism. We have no argument with that. However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ideological racism had not completely developed. Race was not fully reified. Theologians, scientists, and politicians struggled to justify their belief that Native Americans and Africans were less than Europeans. One sees evidence of this ideological struggle in the words of Darwin, Jefferson, and many other influencers of their time.¹⁸

Jefferson, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, pondered the ethics of slavery.¹⁹ He found himself in the contradictory position of writing in support of liberty yet owning slaves, not to mention his sexual relationship with Sally Hemings. As we noted in chapter 1, in *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Darwin made a number of comments on the gap between the English gentlemen and native South Americans, but he also said, “If the misery of the poor be caused, not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, [then] great is our sin.”²⁰ Jefferson held to the idea of the inferiority of Africans but was more sympathetic to the notion of Amerindian equality with Europeans.²¹ On the other hand, the young Darwin was raised in an abolitionist family. His grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood, designed the British Anti-Slavery Society medal.²² Darwin, unlike Jefferson, later in his career would contribute major scholarship that helped to debunk the polygenist views of this period concerning the existence of separately created species and an innate hierarchy among human types.²³

Perhaps it is surprising that we observe that racist ideology—the ideology of different races hierarchically arranged—might be as great now as at any time in history. That is because the *idea of race* is at full strength today. Since at least the time of Jefferson, a counter ideology of egalitarianism and democracy has tried to chip away at the ideology of racism. Racial equality is in the Constitution. A plethora of laws prohibit discrimination by race. Scientists have even proven that our species does not have biological races. Evolution is the main scientific discipline that demonstrates that biological races do not exist within in our species. Yet, in the United States, the majority of Americans either do not accept that evolution is true or simply do not understand it.²⁴

A significant sector of American society draws its belief concerning human biological variation from religious teachings, particularly special

creationism. The racial attitudes of religious denominations in the United States vary considerably, with some of the most racist beliefs and behaviors exhibited by evangelical Christians.²⁵ For example, in 2020, Quan McLauren, the diversity and retention director at Liberty University, resigned, citing university president Jerry Falwell Jr.'s racist and oppressive leadership.²⁶

Throughout our careers, we have been fighting an uphill battle against racism. That is because the ideology of race and racism has history and power on its side. In table 3.1 we visualize the history of racism in America as occurring during a single day. Laws that attempted to chip away at the lived experience of racism didn't start appearing until late in the afternoon. The most significant of these laws did not appear until after 8:00 P.M. Eroding biological racism is difficult, because when scientists present their findings concerning biological variation, most individuals think they see race when what they actually see is skin color variation. Race is reified, and institutionalized white supremacy rewards racist behavior. This is exactly the ideological fuel needed to keep America's racial hierarchy in place.

TABLE 3.1
African American Social Experience Presented as a Single Day

Event	Year	Clock Time
First Africans in Jamestown, VA	1619	12:00 A.M.
Virginia laws differentiating Africans from other servants by race	1682	4:47 A.M.
Fugitive Slave Act	1850	1:50 P.M.
13th Amendment ends slavery	1865	2:43 P.M.
<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> —separate but equal	1896	3:33 P.M.
Red Summer—race riots massacre of African Americans, Tulsa massacre	1919	5:57 P.M.
Black vs white incarceration ratio is 4:1	1950	7:49 P.M.
Emmett Till lynched	1955	8:07 P.M.
Mass incarceration ratio reaches 5:1	1960	8:25 P.M.
Civil Rights Act	1964	8:29 P.M.
Voting Rights Act	1965	8:42 P.M.
Mass incarceration ratio reaches 6:1	1970	9:01 P.M.
Joe Graves earns PhD in evolutionary biology	1988	10:03 P.M.
Mass incarceration ratio reaches 7:1	1989	10:04 P.M.
Killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey	2020	11:59 P.M.

WHAT ARE EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT BIASES?

Quotes such as “I’m not racist,” “I treat everyone the same,” and “I don’t see color” are commonplace. Making fun of these color-blind notions, late night comedian Steven Colbert said, “I don’t see race. People tell me I’m white, and I believe them.”

Explicit biases refer to the attitudes and beliefs that people have about a person or group on a conscious level. Much of the time, these biases and their expression arise as the direct result of a perceived threat. For example, a white woman might say that she wants a white female teenager to babysit her child because she feels more comfortable with a white girl than a Black boy. But more often, these biases are unconscious. She might not consciously realize why she picked the white girl, or that she crossed the street to avoid coming close to a Black male.

As a graduate student in 1981, Joe had a door slammed in his face as he attempted to enter the University of Michigan’s Museum of Zoology. The woman who slammed the door assumed that as a Black male, he had no legitimate reason to be in the building on the weekend. When he produced his key and entered the building, she continued to interrogate him about his purpose for being there. She assumed that there were no Black graduate students in evolutionary biology. He explained to her as gently as he could that he was going back to his laboratory to take care of his animals.

Implicit biases are unconscious attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. We all have unconscious biases. They help us to make decisions. From birth, our brains collect information. We come to have expectations about what is safe to eat, what is a soothing sound, and what a friendly face looks like. We also tend to classify individuals. We grow up to associate lots of behaviors and characteristics with females and males. And we apparently do the same based on skin color and race.

Project Implicit, the developer of tests of implicit bias, starts with the example of someone who smokes a pack of cigarettes a day.²⁷ One could hide this information because of embarrassment. That is an explicit bias; it is a purposeful deceit. On the other hand, one might not be aware of the amount that one smokes and thus might underestimate it. That is implicit bias.

Studies of implicit racial biases have recently mushroomed, uncovering the breadth and depth of such bias and how it influences decision-making

and actions in education, health care, employment, and law enforcement. Implicit racial bias, we now objectively know, is everywhere.

One early example of implicit bias concerned physician recommendations to patients who reported heart problems.²⁸ The researchers recruited white and Black cardiologists at a medical conference and had them observe four actors who were trained to act like patients: a Black female and male and a white female and male. The researchers asked the cardiologists to recommend tests and treatments. The authors found that both Black and white cardiologists treated the Black patients less aggressively than the white patients. After being asked about their different diagnoses and treatment suggestions, the physicians discovered that they were unaware that they had made them.

Similarly, a 2016 study examined interactions between Black patients and white oncologists who had been administered a test for their levels of implicit bias.²⁹ The authors found that oncologists who rated higher in implicit racial bias had shorter interactions with their patients, and their patients rated the interactions as “less patient-centered and supportive” than doctors with less implicit bias. The study also found links between a physician’s bias level and their patients’ confidence in the physician’s recommended treatments, as well as more perceived difficulty in completing them. These and other examples of implicit bias might contribute to decreased effectiveness of health care of Black patients and the huge racial inequalities in disease and death rates.

One of the most powerful examples of the harm caused by implicit bias comes from its role in determining death sentences.³⁰ Previous research on homicide sentencing had shown that when the offender was Black and the victim was white, the offender was more likely to receive the death penalty. Stanford professor Jennifer Eberhardt and her team examined more than six hundred death penalty cases from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from 1979 to 1999. They found within this dataset that the more the offender displayed stereotypically “Black” physical features, the more likely they were to receive the death penalty.

Consider the difference between David Duke, the former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and Donald Trump. Duke is an explicit racist. He does not hide his hopes for unequal and as separate as possible. Everyone knows where he stands. He is an explicit white nationalist and white supremacist. Conversely, Trump claims to be “the least racist person.” Let’s assume that he believes that to be true. If so, then his racism is implicit. His words and actions, including his association with and failure to speak out against white supremacists like Duke, his enacting of the Muslim ban, and

his support for building a border wall, make clear that he implicitly fears Black and brown people.³¹

To summarize, biases, whether explicit or implicit, are important because biases or preconceived notions directly influence actions. These biases have been shown to influence who gets hired for a job.³² The résumés of individuals with traditional Black names are rejected more often than those with traditionally white-sounding names. These biases constrict opportunities from the cradle to the grave. They contribute to institutionalized racism because these biases are deeply cultural and get stuck in the minds of those with the greatest political power.

AM I A RACIST IF I . . . ?

Questions that start with “Am I racist if” are, in truth, a little off. As we’ve said, racism is not so much about individuals as it is about a system. Racism is not so much about thoughts and personal behaviors as it is about histories and institutions. That said, the question “Am I a racist?” is a common one and important to answer. If you are reading this book, we assume you do not want to be a racist.

Nobody is purely a racist or an antiracist. We all, one hopes, are striving to be more antiracist. But sometimes we have racist thoughts and, worse, act in ways that perpetuate racism. Our parents probably repeated racial stereotypes, which got stuck in our brains. We live in racial smog. And our thoughts and actions are connected to systemic, institutional racism. As a house is built on brick and beam, so a system of institutional racism is built on racist idea and racist action.

Yes, we all harbor some racist thoughts. Some might be explicit, and most are probably implicit. We live in a society and time that make it impossible to not be infected by racist memes and not breathe the air of racial differences, codes, and racism. All of us—but perhaps especially folks with so-called white skin privilege, like Alan—need to be aware of them, to be sensitized to them, and then to call them out. Do not be afraid to address them.

Actions that typically come from unconscious thoughts can do harm. Denying a job interview because of a Black-sounding name might be an unconscious thought that leads to an action. It is not yelling and threatening to call the cops on a Black bird-watcher, and it is not a policeman with a knee on the neck of a Black man. Those actions are different. Actions arising from unconscious thoughts probably will not make the evening news. However,

such everyday racism as denying a job is one of the myriad hidden bricks of systemic racism.

If you do something that, in retrospect, is racist, we recommend that you consider the difference between an act of racism and being a racist. A single act does not make you a racist. As Ibram Kendi says, we all do racist stuff.³³ For our culture, that is a norm. The point is to be more aware and, we hope, move from more to less.

Now, why is this all a little off? If you've been reading other sections, you might know what we are about to say. Pause. It is because being racist is not about a specific action. Rather, it is about a system and operating within a system that perpetuates racial inequality.

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS KIND RACISM?

The distinction that historian Donal Muir³⁴ makes between kind and mean racism is close to the distinction between conscious (explicit) and unconscious (implicit) racism. Muir argues that few individuals are intentionally racist. The policies of the KKK are mean, explicitly racist. Nazi laws and genocide were explicitly racist. Jim Crow laws were explicitly racist. The banning of Colin Kaepernick from the NFL was most likely explicitly racist because it was planned—perhaps not formally but nonetheless planned—as a punishment for his activism.

But as Muir argues, most racism is not mean. Perhaps it is not exactly kind either, but that is his term. This racism is often paternalistic. It is thought to be helpful, or at least not harmful. For example, dividing research subjects into races might be seen as kind because it provides separate results by race. If the researcher is focused on genetic differences, it is also racist in thinking that races might respond differently to a drug or treatment. It would not be racist to recognize that socially defined races experience different social, cultural, and physical environments and therefore might respond differently to a drug or treatment. In the former case, the researcher is assuming a biological, innate, and immutable difference between these groups. In the latter case, the researcher is concerned with how institutional racism harms racialized individuals.

Kind racism is also, well, sort of kind. It is the complement of “oh, Blacks have such great rhythm” or “the Asians are so hard working” or “those Jews are great with money.” Kind racisms leave the door open for mean racism.

IS USING THE “N WORD” RACIST? IS IT RACIST IF I AM WHITE?
IS IT RACIST IF I AM BLACK?

Yes, the N word is racist if you are not Black. No, the N word is not racist if you are Black. However, the continued use of this word by African Americans has links to deep self-hatred that was internalized through years of racial subordination in America.³⁵

The N word is a virulent epithet. It harks back to the time of slavery and the Jim Crow era. It harks back to the Negroid race and racial rankings. It is pure hierarchy. It has hurtful overtones. It is not unlike epithets for other minorities and ethnic groups. We need not repeat them here. The N word is at the far end of a continuum of hurtful epithets. Let it die.

If you are Black, uttering the N word might not be polite. It might still shock, and it might still hurt. But it is also a way to defang the short word by embracing it and making it one's own. Fair enough. It is for Blacks only. But Joe would say that Black people will never be truly liberated until they forever erase this word from their vocabulary.

IS ANTI-SEMITISM A FORM OF RACISM?

Yes, and it is a unique form of racism. Anti-Semitism is its own unique form of intolerance and hate and, at the same time, a form of racism.

First, a bit on the illuminating history of the term *anti-Semitism*. From the German *Antisemitismus*, the word was coined in 1879 by William Marr, a German political agitator, to replace *Judenhass* (literally “Jew hatred”).³⁶ The linguistic move was to hide hatred of Jews behind the façade of science. With anti-Semitism, Jews became a Semitic people, or the Semitic people, a race or subrace, and hatred of Jews could then be fit into a scientific hierarchy, Nordics and Aryans at the top and Semitic peoples near the bottom. Anti-Semitism was rationalized.

Some have debated whether anti-Semitism remains the appropriate term for hatred of Jews. Its advantage, racializing Jew hatred, is also its disadvantage. It continues to highlight the old trope that a Jew is always a Jew. In the following, we use “anti-Semitism” or “Jew hatred” when one or the other seems most appropriate.

Why, then, is Jew hatred different from racism? The answer is that Jew hatred does not fit the classic definition of racism: prejudice plus power.

Jews experience lots of anti-Jewish prejudices and hate. Jews have been victims of hate longer than any other group. But unlike other oppressed groups, Jews are seen as both less than (dirty, disgusting, infectious) and as a powerful cabal.

A common trope of Jew hatred is that they are inordinately powerful, somehow in control of the media, banks, and other industries. This lie of Jewish power dates from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,³⁷ a fabrication produced in Russia before the revolution, widely circulated by Henry Ford in the 1920s, and still frequently reproduced. This myth of Jewish power is articulated on the political left, such as in the *Sociology of Freedom*, the 2020 book by Abdullah Öcalan,³⁸ the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party. Öcalan writes, without citations, about an eternal and essential Jew with a powerful ideology. Given Öcalan's stature on the left, his words gained credibility. A widely circulated lie takes on a life, it continues to act. And this leftist anti-Semitism feeds the right and rightists' chant that the (powerful) "Jews will not replace us" (with Black and brown people).

However, Jews are neither powerful, as they have been thought to be in imaginary works, nor do they have an ideology. Jews differ from place to place and time to time. Under Christianity, Jews gravitated toward jobs and positions that were open to them. But there is no Jewish cabal. Believing in such is Jew hatred and lacking in facts. Jews are thought to be both communists and, at the same time, virulent capitalists, and hated for both. Jews are what whites imagine them to be.

Here are some facts about Jews. The number of Jews alive today is less than fifteen million. (It was more than sixteen million before the Holocaust.) More than half a million Jews reside in just two countries: the United States and Israel. Jews make up about 1.8 percent of the U.S. population. That's because Jews escaped from Jew hatred in Europe and the Middle East to Israel and United States. That's hardly the stuff of worldwide control.

Judaism is a religion practiced by people of varied genetic ancestries. That's confusing to many who blanketly call Jews white or think that all Jews have white skin privilege. Many Jews do indeed pass as white and have white skin privilege. These Jews, including Alan, are eastern European or Ashkenazi. Development of the Jewish diaspora led other groups to join, including Sephardic Jews of Iberia, northern Africa, and locals throughout Asia, the Mediterranean, and Africa. The stereotypical Jew is Ashkenazi. After World War II, they became categorized as white, perhaps honorary whites or whites of a different shade, as Jacobson aptly describes³⁹—but, most important, white.

And although not all Jews are middle or upper class, many are. They have some economic power. The result is that on measures of impact of racism, such as education and economic status, Jews in the United States and most European countries seem to be doing okay. Once they could not gain acceptance into certain country clubs, live in certain locations, be admitted to certain hotels, or go to certain schools (like Harvard), but now they can, explicitly if not always implicitly.

Why, then, is the answer to the question, “Is anti-Semitism racism?” a yes? As has been clear since the Middle Ages, Jews have been persecuted. Throughout history, they have been victims of religious persecution, from their expulsion from Spain, to pogroms throughout Eastern Europe, Hitler’s Holocaust, and the rise of anti-Semitic tweets, desecrations, and murders in the United States. These add up to ethnic and racial discrimination and more.

The “more” is captured in stereotypes. The Jew is often seen as a racial type, as having inherent qualities that are biological. In Spain, a Jew would always be a Jew. In Nazi Germany, Jewish blood needed to be avoided at all cost and Aryan blood needed to be protected. Science got involved to study the Jewish type. Efforts were made to recognize Jews and to explain how they became the way they were. And these efforts supported their eradication. As they often do to support racist institutions, science and law worked together.

In a research report published in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* in 1929, Manoiloff, a Russian scientist, wrote that he could discern Jewish from Russian blood. He declared that Jewish blood was paler than Russian blood, which also contained more adrenaline. Manoiloff added reagent to the blood of known Jews and Russians and was able to deduce that they changed color so he could with almost perfect accuracy detect Jewish from Russian blood.⁴⁰ Of course, this is the quintessential unrepeatable experiment. We do not know what reagent he used, and the results are preposterous. But, as Hitler was soon to seize power, it would be important to discern who is a Jew, and the thought is that it was in the blood.

Anti-Semitic science flourished on both sides of the Atlantic. At the University of Virginia Medical School, Robert Bennett Bean, head of the Department of Anatomy, joined a chain of scientists who were fascinated by Jewish noses. His 1913 paper in the *Anatomical Record*, a well-respected publication, is devoted to the study of the unique characteristics of the Jewish nose, complete with an analysis of the surrounding muscles and a theory about which factors accounted for how the Jewish nose form evolved.⁴¹

Given how much anti-Jewish racism exists today, we recommend letting the term “anti-Semitism” die and instead use either “Jew hate” or “anti-Jewish racism.” Because that’s what it is.

IS ISLAMOPHOBIA RACISM?

Similar to the answer regarding Jew hate, Islamophobia—fear or dislike of and prejudice against individuals who identify as followers of Islam, or Muslims—is and is not a form of racism. Islamophobia has not yet taken on the same degree of racist tinge as anti-Semitism. Fear of such individuals focuses more on Islam as a culture, religion, and political power than as a racial essence. However, Islamophobia is a form of virulent ethnocentrism that could be considered a form of cultural racism, that being a Muslim is culturally essential.

In 2019, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding reported that Islamophobia in the United States had increased from the previous year. The increase differed by socially defined race, ethnicity, and religion. Jewish and Hispanic Americans had the most favorable views of Muslims, whereas white evangelicals had the least favorable view (44 percent favorable versus 20 percent unfavorable). On the other hand, Jews had greater than five times more favorable than unfavorable views (53 versus 13 percent), Hispanics had about five times more favorable than unfavorable (51 versus 10 percent), and African Americans seven times more favorable than unfavorable views (35 versus 5 percent).⁴²

At the level of politics, our fear is that the attempt of former President Trump to guard the borders and try to ban travel for individuals from so-called Muslim countries feeds into existing misrepresentations and fears of Muslims. It seems to us that Islamophobia at the political level generalizes from cultural and political intolerance to stereotypes about more than one billion followers of Islam. That is certainly prejudice, and with differential in power, it is also a form of racism.

PEOPLE KEEP TALKING ABOUT “REVERSE DISCRIMINATION,” BUT WHAT IS IT?

Nothing.

This one is easy. Reverse racism, or reverse discrimination, is not a thing. It is a myth. The idea of reverse racism refers to the assumed overreach of affirmative action programs that are aimed at equalizing past injustices against minorities of color. But that is not true.

Now for some history. The idea of affirmative action effectively began in 1961, when President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order creating the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. This very limited order called only for all hiring programs supported with federal funds to ensure that they are free of racial bias. A year after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Lyndon Johnson framed affirmative action this way in his 1965 Howard University commencement address:

You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: “now, you are free to go where you want, do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please.” You do not take a man who for years has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, saying, “you are free to compete with all the others,” and still justly believe you have been completely fair. . . . This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result.

From the 1960s to today, the idea of affirmative action has been hard to enforce, widely debated, and widely misunderstood. The most important legal case to challenge affirmative action is known as *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. In this 1978 case, Allan Bakke claimed that he was denied admission to medical school because of his race. He is white and challenged that positions in the entering class of Davis Medical School had been set aside for disadvantaged minorities, thus disadvantaging him.

But Bakke had the advantages of his white skin privilege. This did not go away. All that was being tried was to make the advantage a bit less.

What Johnson was aiming for over a half century ago was not equality, that everyone is given an equal chance but starts from widely different places. Rather, he was trying to take small steps toward equity, that everyone has an equal chance of admission to school and a job and an equal ability to own a home and build equity in it.

CAN ANYONE BE A RACIST? CAN A PERSON WITH LITTLE ACCESS TO POWER BE RACIST?

No. Like the answer to the reverse racism question, this one is easy. Again, we are helped by the useful definition of racism as prejudice plus power. By definition, those without power cannot be racist. They can—and are

often—prejudiced. We all hold some prejudices. Prejudices are cognitive shortcuts. Without power, you can think like a racist, you can be a cognitive racist, but you cannot set in motion the levers of institutional racism. Your racism does not act on the world.

The most important thing to take away is that racism is not about individual skin colors but about all of our silent collusions and complicities in institutions that change lives.

IS WHITE SUPREMACY ON THE RISE, AND IF SO, WHAT'S GOING ON?

First, let's look at the question, "Is white supremacy on the rise?" Our answer unfortunately seems to be yes: white supremacy is on the rise. It is doubtlessly increasingly visible, and more and more individuals are joining white supremacist groups. The harder question is, "What's going on?" There are a number of theories and ideas about why white supremacy is on the rise and what is in the heads of people who think white supremacist thoughts and act in supremacist ways.

The U.S. State Department has tracked the rise in hate crimes. The Anti-Defamation League tracks anti-Semitic incidents and found that they reached an all-time high in 2019, the last year for which the organization has data. Similar increases have been seen in hate crimes against Black and brown people. The most egregious of these were the 2020 killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Many of those who stormed the Capitol building on January 6, 2021, held white supremacist beliefs and belonged to white supremacist militias.

Our sense is that whites—especially working-class whites—feel increasingly threatened by Black and brown people. They feel that they have less control over their lives. As we write, COVID-19 is still rampant in the United States (and elsewhere in the world). There are huge political divides in America. We live in uncertain and stressful times. It is easier to blame the loss of control on scapegoats, so Black and brown people are portrayed as taking jobs from whites and somehow robbing others of the American dream. This situation has unsettling parallels with how anti-Semitism was used as a catalyst to fuel the growth of the Nazi movement in Germany. On August 11–12, 2017, there were more white supremacists marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, than there were fascists marching with Hitler in the Munich Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923. We believe that in the current situation, we must

pay careful attention to the growth of white supremacy and the hate that it generates or we risk being caught off guard, as were Germans in 1933. We also warn that the lack of a strenuous response to the storming of the Capitol has actually emboldened the white supremacist movement.

WHAT IS WHITE FRAGILITY?

White fragility is a framework popularized and used by Robin DiAngelo to describe a common pattern of behavior and feeling expressed by whites when engaging with race and racism.⁴³ DiAngelo writes that white people are protected from dealing with race and racism. They are insulated by their majority status and the sense that white is not a race, the result of growing up with the expectation that race is not their problem and thus lowers their ability to endure racial discussions and deal with racial situations. As a result, they are frail.

White fragility is a condition in which any degree of racial stress becomes overwhelming and intolerable and thereby triggers a defensive posture. Instead of dealing with hard discussions about the racial world order, whites often say “I am not racist” or “That’s not me” and change the subject.

DiAngelo believes that white fragility is a major impediment to becoming antiracist.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RACE AND CASTE?

Most scholars view a racial contract and castes as different and parallel forms of social and politically sanctioned hierarchies. A few scholars and writers, most notably Isabel Wilkerson and Michelle Alexander, argue that the Western racial hierarchy is a form of caste.

One’s caste in India is determined by birth and is permanent. Intermarriage among castes is discouraged, if not prohibited. This has resulted in genetic divergence to occur between the castes to the extent that they can be identified through genetic markers.⁴⁴ Caste is like class but far more immutable. In India, Dalits are the lowest caste, previously known as “untouchables.”

In the United States, race is associated with class hierarchy and is certainly caste-like. This is an old observation. Both Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal and British anthropologist Ashley Montagu made this observation in the 1940s.⁴⁵ Caste is like race, in that it is assigned at birth based on the

caste into which one is born. It is like a class system, in that social immobility leads to a trap that makes it hard to escape one's class and caste. Liberal thinkers might say that class mobility is possible, whereas caste mobility, moving out of one's caste, is not possible. However, the data on low class mobility in America refutes the notion that these are so different. Sociologists have long recognized that capitalist economies operate with dual labor markets.⁴⁶ In America, racially subordinated groups have been differentially relegated to the secondary market, which is characterized by menial and irregular labor.⁴⁷ To make the situation even worse, in the later portion of the twentieth century, the irregular labor market grew, as well as the percentage of people who are structurally unemployed.⁴⁸ This means that upward social mobility for most racially subordinated persons in America is gradually ceasing to exist.⁴⁹

Wilkerson recently wrote that race in America is much like the caste system of India. One is born into one's race, and the expectations and limits of race are the same as in a caste. She formulates that race is a visible manifestation of an underlying system and that caste and inequality make up the invisible structure. Race is the skin, and caste is the bones.

WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL RACISM? HOW DO WE KNOW THAT IT STILL EXISTS?

Institutional racism refers to the work of institutions such as education, health care, and law enforcement to treat individuals differently based on race. The differential access and engagement with institutions is a major way that racism becomes real. Institutional racism highlights the ways that institutions, rather than individuals, drive racial inequalities. Some prefer terms such as "structural racism" or "systemic racism" to highlight how racism is part of the structure of society and a system that promotes inequality.

Some forms of institutional racism are explicit. For example, mortgage companies were clear about their practices of giving home mortgages to white families in certain areas while denying them to families of color with the same credentials and means. This practice, as noted earlier, was referred to as *redlining*.

Often, institutional racism is a silent code—whereby individuals and groups are treated differently. Predominantly Black schools lack the resources of predominantly white schools.⁵⁰ In chapter 4, we discuss how toxic waste dumps are often located closer to predominantly Black and brown than

white areas. Policing is less effective in communities of color than in white communities. No one in America has ever viewed a video on television of a white person being choked to death by Black officers (the opposite of what happened to Eric Garner), or heard a report of Black officers breaking into the apartment of a white nurse and shooting her dead (as opposed to what happened to Breonna Taylor), or watching a white citizen having his neck crushed by a Black officer (such as the opposite of what happened to George Floyd). And on and on.

The proof of the existence of institutional racism is in the facts of differential treatment in almost all aspects of life. Black life expectancy, for example, is less than white life expectancy (see chapter 5). And this is not just a matter of having less money or lower socioeconomic class, although money and class are important. The data show that Blacks live shorter lives than whites at all educational levels. This is proof of systemic racism. One sign of the elimination of systemic racism is equality of life expectancy. The gap has closed slightly, and we look forward to it closing more and to all of us living our potential for as full a life as possible.