



It Isn't a Black & White Issue: *Racial Bias in the United States*

A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion White Paper



SpectraDIVERSITY

Powering Inclusive Cultures

About Us

[Spectra Diversity](#) is a diversity and inclusion company providing products and tools for those working in the diversity and inclusion field. Partner Amy Tolbert, Ph.D., CSP, was the co-creator of the Discovering Diversity Profile® (DDP). From 1994 – 2015 the DDP was the only valid reliable instrument in the market specifically designed as a learning instrument that helped individuals learn how they respond to diversity issues and where they need to develop increased understanding and skills. Jonamay Lambert was the co-creator of the RespectAbility Self-Assessment Diagnostic Tool. Chris Jones is an internationally recognized writer of all forms of media. Patricia Jespersen brings her experience of working with ProGroup (now KornFerry), a national leader in Diversity and Inclusion services.

Together, our four Spectra Diversity partners have careers rich in diversity and inclusion efforts, while working with clients ranging from corporate leaders to non-profits, and from Fortune 100 companies to storied educational institutions and entrepreneurial start-ups. We are a women-owned business. We are committed to this work.

Our Mission: Spectra Diversity is committed to honoring differences and helping others to create a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Racial Bias Overview



Most of us subscribe to the traditional view of racism. That is, racism is uncomplicated and easy to identify and manage. As Zeba Blay, senior culture writer for the Huffington Post says, the opposite is true:

*[R]acism (and race) is incredibly complex. Many people think racism means one group of people hates another group of people. However, racism manifests in all kinds of subtle and insidious ways. It operates on both a micro and macro level. For this reason, it's so hard to talk about racism, or even recognize it when it's going on.*ⁱ

Racial bias is pervasive, and it compromises the economic, political, and social sectors of society. Larry Edelman, executive producer of the PBS program *Race the Power of Illusion*, thinks most of us believe that we are experts on race, racism, and racial bias. He writes, "Yet ask 10 people to define race or name 'the races,' and you're likely to get 10 different answers... Few issues are characterized by more contradictory assumptions and myths, each voiced with absolute certainty."ⁱⁱ

Consequently, we need to clarify that racial bias is rooted in economics and a quest for domination. Racism is a social construct. It is systemic, structural, and individual and based on the belief in the supremacy of one racial group over another. Writing in *Affinity Magazine*, Sebastian Whitaker asserts that racism is *different from* prejudice: “Anyone can be prejudiced toward anyone else, regardless of their race. [In America,] people of color can certainly be prejudiced toward white people. However, it is not racism because there is no larger system in place which oppresses white people.”³



Economics and Racism

Racism is an ideology invented by 17th century European scientists; they created a racial hierarchy, claiming that people with non-white features and darker skin colors were less human than whites. Their purpose was to justify slavery, arguing it was ethical for whites to subjugate “lesser” mortals. In fact, they advised that non-whites would benefit from the domination and tutelage of their white masters.

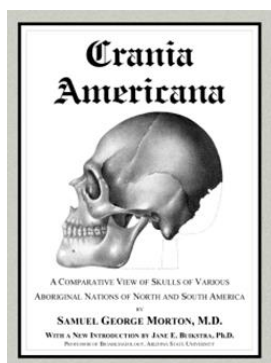
The link between economics and racial is evident in the early years of the birth of our nation, that is to the founding of Jamestown in 1608 and its first 75 years. In the minds of the very first English colonists, class distinctions trumped racial ones. The marriage of John Rolfe to Pocahontas in Jamestown in 1616 was a scandal, not because of racial differences, but because Pocahontas was a Powhatan princess and Rolfe only a commoner. Even the arrival of the first slaves to Jamestown and the Chesapeake Colonies did not change these attitudes.

During the first 70 years the life in the settlement on the James River, European indentured servants, native American, and African slaves interacted freely with little racial bias. In his classic text, *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn points out that, “It was common, for example, for servants and slaves to run away together, steal hogs together, get drunk together. It was not uncommon for them to make love together.”ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, according to Zinn, “there was little in the way of real difference between a slave from Africa and an indentured servant from Ireland or a London slum.”^{iv}



However, when white and black indentured servants and enslaved black people joined forces in Bacon's rebellion in 1676 and burned Jamestown to the ground, wealthy, white property owners became distressed. After the rebellion, they introduced legal distinctions separating "white" and "black" inhabitants and eliminated indentured servitude to ensure that blacks would not work alongside whites in unpaid labor. The colonial establishment instituted more severe punishments for blacks who committed legal infractions than those established for whites; and they hardened slavery, making it a permanent status and heritable for blacks.

In contrast, they gave poor whites special privileges and new rights and elevated their status above blacks. They also hired whites as overseers to police the work of black slaves. Bacon's Rebellion accelerated the growth of slavery and introduced the strategy of using race to divide society's poor into feuding camps and undermine their power to influence society. Moreover, the Rebellion is an early example of how gaining economic advantage is a key driver of racial bias. This strategy will be repeated throughout the history of the United States.^v



Europeans were not the only ones to twist science to promote white supremacy. In 1839, In his *Crania Americana*, the first famous American scientist, Samuel Morton, argued that Caucasians had larger skulls, which give them "'decided and unquestioned superiority over all the nations of the earth.'"^{vi} *Crania Americana* has been called "undoubtedly the most important work in the history of scientific racism."^{vii} Pro-slavery scientists, such as Josiah Nott and Louis Agassiz, popularized Morton's findings in their defense of slavery and claimed that whites are racially superior.



American advocates of white superiority saw immigrants from southern and eastern Europe as inferior even though they were white. When the inflow of these immigrants swelled significantly in 1899, white supremacists needed a justification for deeming them to be inferior to people from northern Europe. Anthropologist William V. Ripley filled this demand in his *The Races of Europe* in which he postulated a hierarchy of subraces and sub-subraces. He proposed that the white race contained some degraded subraces, including people of Semitic, Celtic, and Italian origins.^{viii} Thus, they saw it eminently moral and logical to discriminate against the Irish, Jews, Italians, and people from Eastern Europe.

Native Americans

While the blacks were being enslaved, the Native Americans (the red men and women) were being slowly exterminated in what historians are now describing as genocide. By the close of the Indian Wars in the late 19th century, fewer than 238,000 indigenous people remained, a sharp decline from the estimated 5 million to 15 million living in North America when Columbus arrived in 1492.^{ix}



Trail of Tears: National Park Service photo



Burial @ Wounded Knee: Library of Congress

Although the early settlers mingled with the local tribes (our Thanksgiving heritage story), the Native Americans sided with the British during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Over time the new settlers, most of whom had been barred from inheriting property in Europe, arrived on American shores hungry for Indian land—and the abundant natural resources that came with it. In addition, the Native tribes people looked “different” and spoke other languages, contributing to the distinction of “other”.

Several massacres occurred in the 18, 19 and 20th century. President Andrew Jackson pushed for the Indian Removal Bill of 1830, which pushed 60,000 Native people westward and led to the Trail of Tears. The last major killing of Native Americans took place in December 1890, after Sioux Chief Sitting Bull was killed while being arrested. The U.S. Army’s Seventh Cavalry massacred 150 to 200 ghost dancers at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.^x

Today, the Native American population is back up to about 5 million.

Europe

Of course, racism is not limited to the United States. In Europe, as in the U.S., economics is associated with racism. Ethnic “minorities and different cultures in one country can often be used as a scapegoat for the majority during times of economic crisis. That is one reason Nazism became so popular,” writes Anup Shah on Globalissues.org.^{xi}



For example, in the United Kingdom, racialized nationalism and the financial crisis of 2008 were the driving forces behind the Leave campaign, which resulted in the passage of the June 23, 2016 referendum that demanded withdrawal from the European Union. “If confirmation were needed that the case for Brexit was intimately bound up with questions of race, it was to be found in the wave of racist hate unleashed against migrants as well as the long-established black and brown British,”^{xii} according to scholars Satnum Virdee and Brendan McGeever writing in *Ethnic and Studies*.

The National Police Chiefs Council received 6,000 reports of racist hate crimes in the four weeks following the announcement of the referendum results. More than half of the racist taunts reported—e.g. “dirty paki scum” and “pakis need to be rounded up and shot”—were followed by references to Brexit, such as “We voted you out” and “we’re out of the EU now, we can get rid of your lot.” Violence against migrants was not limited to black and brown people. In August 2016, six teenage boys beat an eastern European migrant to death after they heard him speaking Polish. These acts of hate speech and violence reveal how “racism has become normalized in both elite political discourse and practice and everyday life,” in the United Kingdom.^{xiii}



A substantial number of Britains see Brexit as vehicle for expelling members of Roma communities. Often racially profiled as con artists and criminals by police and the public, the Romany people have long been one of the most marginalized people in Europe. Also known as Travelers or “Gypsies,” the Roma have traditionally been a travelling group whose members often have no fixed address. (“Gypsies” is considered a racist term.) In addition, many Roma are illiterate and find it difficult to provide the paperwork required to establish residency; few of them have access to the digital networks through which to submit documentation.

Racial animosity and hostility to open borders mandated by the European Union is not confined to the United Kingdom. On June 18, 2018, Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini announced that the government would conduct a census to identify all Roma immigrants and expel them. Salvini stated his regret that Italy would have to “keep the Italian Roma because we can’t expel them.”^{xiv}

Moreover, Europe has dealt recently with the most extreme consequences of racial bias—racial cleansing and genocide. Ethnic cleansing (the forced expulsion of ethnic, religious, or racial group by another group to make a population more homogeneous) and genocide (the mass murder of members of ethnic, racial, or religious groups, often for the same purpose) did not end with the victory over the Axis powers in 1945.

These extreme forms of racial violence have occurred across the globe in recent years. In 1971, Pakistani soldiers killed from 300,000 to more than 3 million Bengali citizens. Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge murdered from 1.5 to 3 million Cambodians from 1975 to 1979. Between 1992 and 1993, Abkhaz separatists forced 250,00 ethnic Georgians to flee their native country and killed approximately 30,000. In 1994, members of the Hutu majority of Rwanda massacred 500,000 to 1,000,000 members of the Tutsi and Pygmy Batwa populations, along with moderate Hutus. ON July 11, 1995, Bosnian Serb forces overwhelmed Dutch peacekeeping forces protecting Bosnian Muslims in the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica and murdered 7,000 to 8,000 men and boys.

Genocide



There are at least five genocides underway today:

- In Myanmar, Buddhists have killed 3,000 and displaced 270,00 members of the Muslim Rohingya minority.
- In South Sudan, members of the Dinka ethnic group are conducting a campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing against rival ethnic groups, including the Nuer people.
- In Syria and Iraq, ISIS terrorists launched a ruthless genocide against Shite Muslims and non-Muslim groups—e.g. Assyrian and other Christians and the Yazidis people—in 2014
- In the Central African Republic, a civil war between Christians and Muslims appears to be escalating into genocidal violence.^{xv}

An Upsurge of Blatant Racism and Hate Crimes

America is not innocent of the increase in racial violence. According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, “racism and xenophobia are on the rise across the USA.”^{xvi} UN human rights experts believe the “violence in Charlottesville and the racial hatred displayed by right-wing extremists, white supremacists and neo-Nazi groups [. . . are . . .] the latest examples of increasing racism, racial discrimination, Afrophobia, racist violence and xenophobia observed in demonstrations across the USA.”^{xvii} They emphasized that overt racism and white supremacy were not limited to the Charlottesville, as demonstrated by “recent incidents in California, Oregon, New Orleans and Kentucky.”^{xviii}



Why has racial bias increased in recent years? One factor is the fear many white Americans feel in face of the growth in diverse population. According to Brookings Institute, whites will become a minority in 2045. In that year, the population will be 49.9 % white, 24.6 Latino, 13.1 % black, 7.8 % Asians and 3.8 % multiracial. Even though there will still be twice as many white Americans as Latinos, the next largest group, many whites fear that this shift in population will end their cultural dominance.



The acceptance of overt racism, the rise in racist language (either coded or overt), the spread of white supremacy movements, and protests over the removal of Confederate monuments signify white uncertainty and anger. Writing in The National Geographic, Michelle Norris says, “This is a conversation already exploding across the country as some white Americans, in online forums and protests, react anxiously and angrily to a sense that their way of life is under threat.”^{xix}

The racial divide has become so wide and extreme that almost one third of Americans think another civil war could break in the next few years. Many believe this conflict many believe would in opposition to President Donald Trump’s policies. Many see these policies as designed to eliminate reverse the advances made by minority population since the 1960s.

Explicit Versus Implicit

Whatever the cause of the rise in racial bias and the need to confront racial violence, we must recognize there are various forms of bias. Sometimes, racial bias is explicit. They are conscious ideas; they result in overt intolerance in which we base antipathy towards people, because of race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity or social, religious or political views; we know we have them. We may embrace them, or we may believe them to be irrational and harmful and try to control them, but it is difficult to avoid them, because they thrive in the U.S. culture. We also develop implicit biases, which form in the unconscious.



The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity defines implicit biases as, “The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.” The Institute asserts that implicit biases are

- Activated in the unconscious without an individuals’ intention, awareness, or control.
- Possessed by everyone, including people who are committed to impartiality and fairness.
- Distinct from and often uninfluenced by explicit beliefs and values.
- Connected to behavior that can have significant impacts on employment, education, criminal justice and other activities.
- Malleable and can be “unlearned” and replaced with new mental associations”.

During a visit to home improvement retailer Home Depot, a friend of ours was delighted to find a short checkout line until the black woman in front began challenging the cashier about price. He became a little irritated. “Why do black people always complain so much?” Embarrassed, he thought, “Maybe, because they are so used to be ripped off by white people? Or maybe black people do not complain more often than whites.”



Our friend has been committed to diversity and inclusion (D&I), at least, since in his early teens when he saw Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, live on television, but he admits he is not immune to racial bias.

We are all susceptible to these biased viewpoints that can be favorable or unfavorable, and, since they are formed deep in the unconscious, they are different from the unspoken prejudices we may conceal out of shame.

“In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.” — Toni Morrison

President Barack Obama discussed the hidden harms of implicit bias in his eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney, one of the nine people killed during the June 17, 2015 shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston South Carolina. Noting that racial bias can function consciously and unconsciously, President Obama speculated that,



“Maybe we now realize the way racial bias can infect us even when we don’t realize it, so that we’re guarding against not just racial slurs, but we’re also guarding against the subtle impulse to call Johnny back for a job interview but not Jamal.”^{xx}

Thus, implicit biases are often destructive and negatively affect our relationships with co-workers, acquaintances, friends, and neighbors. We are obligated to try to identify and correct the consequences of this hidden bigotry.

Internalized Versus Externalized

Management strategist and consultant John Fitzgerald Gates has identified two additional types of racial bias: internalized and externalized. **Internalized bias** is an acceptance of negative stereotypes about oneself. It is a validation of the bigoted messages about one’s group, and it can turn into “a form of self-hatred that can extend to hatred of one’s race, family, social group or national identity.”^{xxi}

Externalized bias is extreme hatred of the culture, systems, people, and government that one views as the oppressor. It is often associated with terrorism, irrational rage, and mental illness.

Guerrilla Bias

Sondra Thiederman, noted expert on diversity, bias reduction, and cross-cultural issues has identified a form of implicit bias, which can negatively impact productivity and inclusion. She argues,

“Misunderstandings and good intentions can lead to an insidious form of bias that diminishes organizational effectiveness and fuels tension—actually decreasing acceptance of coworkers’ diverse characteristics, knowledge, and skills. By renewing your vision of the world, you can change the biases that permeate your thinking and begin to see people as individuals.”^{xxii}



She calls this form of bias “Guerilla Bias™,” which is racism disguised by good intentions. It is “based on the perverse premise that all women, emerging groups (previously called minorities), people with disabilities, and those who are outside the so-called ‘majority’ population are to some degree fragile, quick to explode, or in need of special treatment.”^{xxiii}

This bias is especially destructive in the workplace where it prevents leaders from treating people—minorities and non-minorities—fairly who, for fear of appearing racist, make “excessive accommodation of cultural differences during key negotiations.”^{xxiv} Thiederman offers the example of a black woman who was responsible for diversity in her organization. The Guerilla-Biased members of her team were so concerned that they might offend her that they “refused to reveal the very real challenges faced by her organization. The result was a stifled diversity effort and a workplace where communication [was] continually hamstrung by the belief that people different from us need to be handled with kid gloves.”^{xxv}

Guerilla Bias can harm our organizations in many more ways than distorted leadership decisions. Productive employees may leave the company, because they realize their supervisors will never give them the challenges they need to advance, because their managers lack confidence in them. Guerilla Racism impedes open and candid communications, which are vital to organizational success. It also can cultivate additional bigotry, because it promotes the hiring, retention, and promotion of unqualified people, which can confirm the false, prejudiced suppositions of coworkers.

It can also undermine the careers of managers whose organizations fail to meet expectations, because of accommodations for underperforming or unqualified employees.

Racial bias does not only affect us on the job. It touches society in subtle and some not so subtle ways. We are surprised when we realize how racial bias affects people in practically every aspect of the daily lives. For example, we see its impacts in medicine, financing housing, and law enforcement.

Medicine

- According to Professor David Williams, professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University, researchers found that physicians give Latinos and African Americans significantly less pain medication than they give whites.^{xxvi}
- In addition, minorities are more likely than whites to be treated with “less-desirable procedures, such as lower limb amputations for diabetes and other conditions.”^{xxvii}

Housing

- A study of major banks in Washington, D.C., determined that 75% of home lending in the region went to Whites, even though they made up only 36 % of the households. In comparison, fifty-six % were black and received only 18.5 %. A nationwide review of conventional loans found that only 2.6 % went to black borrowers and just 5 % went to Latinos.^{xxviii}

Law Enforcement

- Based on current trends, the odds that a boy born today will go to prison sometime in his lifetime vary dramatically from race to race. The chances are one in three for black American males, one in six for Latino males, and one in seventeen for white males.^{xxix}
- A study of 17,000 court decisions from South Carolina courts concluded that a black defendant with no criminal history was 43 % more likely to be jailed than a white defendant with no criminal record.^{xxx}
- According to an analysis of county-level police shootings (2011-2014) in the United States, police were 3.49 times more likely to shoot an unarmed black American than an unarmed white American.^{xxxi}

Moreover, racial bias often determines how equitably society's resources are shared. For example, racial bias is a principal cause of the income inequality that is driving a wedge between Americans today. Only seven (0.174 percent) of the 400 wealthiest Americans are black or Latino. Incidentally, the combined wealth of those 400 Americans exceeds the total wealth of 64 % of the total population.^{xxxii}

As diversity and inclusion professionals, we are very familiar with statistics like these, and we tackle racial and ethnic bias every day. This white paper endeavors to provide more nuanced view of review of racial bias, look at its impacts on management, and offer some strategies for dealing with it.

Of course, this is an enormous subject with enough complexities to fill a library of books, and, we make no claim of comprehensiveness. In fact, we found the history of bias in America to be so extensive and multidimensional that we simplified our presentation in a timeline of the key racial events in our history and included it as an appendix. The timeline covers the period from the founding of the Jamestown (1607) to the present. We hope you will take time to review the entire document, in part, because it illustrates how some of the dynamics of racism began shaping our nation from its very beginnings. The timeline also demonstrates how the past gives us lessons for the future.

The Roots of Racial Bias in the U.S.

Racial bias has had profound impacts on our society, and its roots reach back to the birth of our nation. A review of our history reveals racial bias at work. This becomes evident in a review of the appendix to this white paper—Timeline of Racial Bias in America. Racial bias has twisted our history, sent us to war against each other, and created serious divisions that resulted in stunted lives, unnecessary violence and death, and assaults on the American Dream. These impacts are with us today, and they affect every layer of our society. Most Americans still see it as a problem.

Japanese Internment



Families were permitted one suitcase per person.

Issei: first-generation Japanese Americans who had emigrated from Japan and were not eligible for U.S. citizenship.

Nisei: second-generation individuals born in the United States who were U.S. citizens.

An example of racial bias which still resonates today, is that of the Japanese Internment during World War II. Within 48 hours of the bombing at Pearl Harbor, about 1,500 adult male Japanese community leaders were arrested by the FBI even though fewer than 3% of those arrested might be inclined toward sabotage or spying - and the Navy and the FBI already knew who most of those individuals were. Still, the government took the position summed up by John DeWitt, the Army general in command of the coast: "A Jap's a Jap. They are a dangerous element, whether loyal or not."^{xxxiii}

Two months later, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which gave the U.S. military authority to exclude any persons from specific west coast areas, and Hawaii. Although the word Japanese did not appear in the executive order, it was clear that only Japanese Americans were targeted, though some other immigrants, including Germans, Italians, and Aleuts, also faced detention during the war.^{xxxiv}

Those in the designated areas, both Issei and Nisei, were given one week to sell their homes or businesses (or find suitable caretakers) and move to one of 10 camps located in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Arkansas. Approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans were affected.

The re-location was challenged in court. *Korematsu v. United States* led to a Supreme Court ruling in 1944 that the evacuation and internment of Nisei was constitutional. *Korematsu* was recently referenced in the 2018 Supreme Court *Trump v. Hawaii* travel ban ruling. Justice Sotomayor's strong dissent captures the fear that, while "finally overruling" *Korematsu*, which she calls a "shameful precedent," is "laudable and long overdue," one kind of *Korematsu* decision had been swapped for another. She points out "stark parallels" in the reasoning, noting that,

"As here, the Government invoked an ill-defined national-security threat to justify an exclusionary policy of sweeping proportion... As here, the exclusion order was rooted in dangerous stereotypes about, inter alia, a particular group's supposed inability to assimilate and desire to harm the United States."^{xxxv}

Racial Bias Today

Although 54 years have passed since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racial bias remains a significant issue that needs to be addressed. As evident in Table One, most Americans agree with this assessment, and many view it as a *growing* problem. Pew Research found an eight-percentage-point jump in the share of Americans who say racism is a “big problem” from July 2015 (50 percent) to August 2017 (58 percent). In November 11, 2011, the share was (28 percent); thus, the share of Americans who believe that racism is a “big problem” jumped 30 percentage points in less than six years. It also doubled among Republicans or people who leaned Republicans, increasing from 18 % in January 2009 to 37 % in 2017, a 19 % increase in eight years [the figure fell three percentage points from July 2015 (40 percent) to August 2017].^{xxxvi}

Table 1: Americans’ Views on Racism: 1995 to 2017^{xxxvii}

| Racism is . . . | September 1995 | January 2009 | April 2010 | November 2011 | July 2015 | August 2017 |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| Not a Problem | 4 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 3 |
| A Small Problem | 12 | 22 | 19 | 16 | 11 | 9 |
| Somewhat of a Problem | 42 | 48 | 42 | 48 | 33 | 29 |
| A Big Problem | 41 | 26 | 33 | 28 | 50 | 58 |

Note: Responses of “not sure” are not included in the Table 1. Consequently, some of the columns do not up to 100.

Table 2: Partisan Gap in Americans’ Views of Racism: 2009 to 2017

| Racism is a big problem . . . | Jan 2009 | July 2015 | August 2017 |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Democrat/Lean Dem. | 32 | 58 | 76 |
| Republican/Lean Rep. | 18 | 40 | 37 |
| Blacks | 44 | 73 | 81 |
| Whites | 22 | 44 | 52 |

A Pew survey conducted in April and May of 2018 discovered that 58 % of American adults believe that the influx of more people of different races, ethnic groups and nationalities make the country a better place to live. Although these figures represent only a modest change from last year, the results suggest that most Americans see value in diversity, which is good news regarding the battle against racism.^{xxxviii}

Racial Bias and Business



The persistence of racial bias is alarming, especially when you consider its impacts on society. If we focus on its impact on businesses, for example, racial bias can affect the success of an enterprise. The most recent public example of the harm racial bias can inflict on a business was the treatment of two black men at a Philadelphia Starbucks. The companies thought it necessary to close its 8,000 company-owned stores on the afternoon of May 29, 2018, to provide some 175,000 employees with racial bias training. This significant and costly action was necessary because the idea of an “unwelcoming Starbucks” was a direct threat to the company brand as a “third space”—that place, neither home nor office, where you can sit down, meet people, work, rest a minute, recharge.”^{xxxix}

Classic economic theory has long argued that racial bias is bad for business. Nobel Prize winning economist Gary Becker, a member of the conservative Chicago School of Economics along with his mentor, Milton Friedman, theorized that employers who discriminate in hiring prioritize attributes of employees that are irrelevant to productivity, putting themselves in a competitive disadvantage. In highly aggressive markets, discriminatory practices often drive firms out of business.^{xi}

Until recently, it has been difficult to test this theoretical proposition empirically, because of the difficulty of measuring discrimination. However, a recent study was able to compare survival rates of companies that were engaged in discrimination in 2004 with comparable ones that were not. Six years later, 36 % of the firms that discriminated had failed; however, only 17 % of nondiscriminatory establishments had collapsed. That is half the rate of the discriminatory firms.^{xli}

Given the wide acceptance of the proposition that discrimination harms company productivity and profitability, one would expect significant decreases in companies that discriminate in hiring. Nonetheless, a recent (September 12, 2017) meta-analysis of field experiments found a modest decline in hiring discrimination against Latinos, but no change in the level of hiring discrimination against African Americans over the past 25 years. Encompassing 55,842 applications submitted for 26,326 positions, the study found that whites receive on average 36% more callbacks than African Americans, and 24% more callbacks than Latinos.^{xlii}

Many studies reveal that active discrimination still exists in the United States, despite reform efforts. Sociologists Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers argue that there has been “a profound erosion of the structures of racial domination and oppression. An erosion, yes; but not an elimination.”^{xliii}



What to Do?

At the same time, racial discrimination remains as a pervasive iniquity. In their assessment of race in America today, Wright and Rogers identify three central characteristics that typify the status of racial bias:

- Considerable progress has been made following the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which has enabled the emergence of a solid black middle class of educated workers, professionals, and small business owners. African-Americans and other minorities also have an established presence within the corporate, cultural and political elite.^{xliv}
- Discriminatory practices still affect minorities of all economic classes in “mundane social interactions and in the major institutional contexts in which lives, and opportunities are formed.”^{xlv} These practices “violate values of fairness, and they block the further advance of racial equality.”^{xlvi}
- Black Americans and Latinos still endure acute poverty and economic marginalization at much higher rates than other racial groups. Poverty and discrimination have also advanced the mass incarceration of poor, young minority men, which “deepens their marginalization from the labor force and stable employment.”^{xlvii}

As D&I professionals, we find this situation, although unsurprising disheartening, and we wonder what it will take to solve the problem of racial bias. At the same time, some of us may feel complicit, because of our growing understanding of unconscious or implicit bias. Diversity training consultant Howard Ross argues, “Over 1,000 studies in the past 10 years alone have conclusively shown that if you’re human, you have bias, and that it impacts almost every variation of human identity: Race, gender, sexual orientation, body size, religion, accent, height, hand dominance, etc.”^{xlviii}

How can we battle racial bias if we might have our own biases that can affect how we recruit and retain the best people, make decisions on managing our organizations, and determine how we relate to coworkers and reports? We cannot hope to eliminate our biases, because they are often unconscious. However, we can learn to guard against them, mitigate their impacts on our decision-making, and structure our organizations to protect against them.

We need to make ourselves and the people in our organizations [cognizant of implicit bias](#) and its potential impacts on decision-making. Once we become alert to the threat of bias, we begin to watch out for it and deal with it on an ongoing basis. Another approach is to identify ways to encourage us to become more deliberate and conscious in our decision making, which, according to Ross, can “occur in three areas: priming; reorganized structures and systems; and new forms of accountability.”^{xlix}



Priming

We can prime ourselves and others to be more aware of bias in decision making. For example, we can encourage managers to ask themselves a series of questions when they review resumes, questions that tease out some elements of potential bias:

- “Does some aspect of the resume strike you in a particularly positive or negative way? Is that factor relevant to performance of the job?”ⁱ
- “Do you identify some personal link to you in the resume, such as background, cultural preferences, or a quality you share?”ⁱⁱ
- Does the resume remind you of someone you know? Does this person evoke positive or negative feelings?ⁱⁱⁱ

Reorganized Structures or Systems

We can reorganize structures and processes that discourage bias. For example, we can provide managers with resumes that are anonymous. Thus, we can eliminate gender bias or racial bias when a name might suggest that the candidate is female, Asian, black or Latino. We can do performance reviews by multiple managers to ensure that one manager’s assessments are not significantly more or less rigorous than his or her counterparts. Or we can help managers learn to run meetings that encourage broader participation by attendees.

Accountability

Finally, we can introduce practices to [ensure accountability to identify and eliminate patterns of bias](#). We can inquire into a manager’s performance reviews. For example, does one gender or race dominate the top or bottom evaluations? If there are five men and five women on a ten-person team, and four out of the five top reviews go to men, we need to look at the question of bias.

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Five Recommendations

John Fitzgerald Gates also provides solid advice on mitigating bias by becoming hyper aware of the possibility of unconscious bias by an individual or an organization. He offers five recommendations:

- 1 Do not presume—it is harmful and too easy to make erroneous assumptions that unfairly categorize people or situations.
- 2 Test your decisions or preferences in terms of your actions—if you favor tall people over short ones in the distribution of choice assignments, check to ensure that your decisions are based on business reasons not personal biases.
- 3 Test your decisions and actions against someone you love, admire or respect—would you treat them the same way as you do others?
- 4 Seek the consult of the people your actions affect—solicit and be open to sincere feedback.
- 5 Evaluate your organization’s policies and practices—if you see assumptions or biases that could cause discrimination or harm, speak up and work to make changes.

Seeking Hope: Driving Change

As civil rights and U.S. Congressman John Lewis reminds us, “The scars and stains of racism are still deeply embedded in the American society.”^{liii} As we have seen, racial bias has been a prominent force in American society since at least as early as 1676. Our growing understanding of implicit or unconscious bias only reinforces our recognition of the difficulty of rooting racial bias out of our culture. However, we are seeing examples of positive change that resist even unconscious bias. Howard Ross has provided us with an inspiring success story.



In 1970, the world’s most renowned symphony orchestras were 95 % male. Ten years of intense efforts to promote gender equity increased the percentage of female musicians from 5 % to a high of 12 % in the most gender-positive orchestra. According to Ross, “the bias that held women back was both conscious and unconscious. Regardless of which, it was universal in its impact. And yet, today almost 40% of orchestral musicians are women.”^{liv} As Ross points, the extraordinary increase in female musicians was fueled by the introduction of practices by orchestras to eliminate bias in their hiring processes. Once reliant on personal invitations, they opened their recruiting processes by advertising through the musicians’ unions and other publications, which increased the number of musicians auditioning by a multiple of five. They also began auditioning behind a shield—think of the television show *The Voice*—so that auditioners could focus on the performance rather than the performer.^{lv}

This victory over implicit bias reminds us of the message that came with Representative Lewis' quotation:



“We have to give all our people, and especially our young people, our children, a sense of hope and faith that we’re going to make it, that we’re going to overcome. And tell them not to get lost in a sea of despair or become bitter or hostile, that the way of love is a much better way.”^{lvi}

Despite our concerns over the present, our fears of the future, and the challenges of conscious and unconscious bias, we still have much cause for hope.

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FOOTNOTES

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