

## 4TH GENERATION RACIST: CAN YOU BE ANTI-RACIST IF YOU'RE ANTI-WHITE?

by *Racialicious special correspondent* [Latoya Peterson](#)

**Disclaimer:** The thoughts and ideas presented in this very long post do not reflect the thoughts or feelings of the blog owner, or any of the blog affiliates. The piece chronicles my journey from being anti-white, to grudging tolerance, to what I am working toward now - full acceptance of all people, regardless of race. The thoughts below are not necessarily what I believe now - but they are all beliefs I have held at some time or another.

If you are already threatened by any perceived anti-white sentiments on this site, you may want to stop reading now. However, if you want to explore issues that some PoCs have with white people (as more than a few of my sentiments are shared) and why it is important to acknowledge and overcome these ideas, read on. I'll be checking in throughout the day to respond to questions and comments, as this is such a provocative topic. — LP



How do racists think?

Where do their racist beliefs come from? How do they continue to justify their beliefs in our increasingly multi-culti society?

For me, finding the answers to these questions are easy.

All I have to do is look inside of myself.

The reason I am involved with racial activism today, the motivation behind wanting to build bridges and understanding between different groups of people, the reason I found Racialicious in the first place all stems from one thing: my intrinsic bias against white people.

The bias I acquired - and the racist behavior I engaged in due to that bias - was fostered in two ways.

First, there was anti-white sentiment reinforced by my family, who had experienced all kinds of problems interacting with white society. Starting with my great-grandmother claiming African-American heritage in lieu of her actual Native American heritage (effectively choosing a life marred with prejudice over possible extermination) and ending with my mother's instructions on how to navigate a world that is hostile to people of color, my family holds a deep mistrust against white people.

Second, there is the reinforcement by my community. Many people of color harbor some sort of bias or issue with white people. It could be subtle comments about differences or insulation within one's own community or outright hatred - the undercurrent of bias exists, and is actively reinforced by the PoC community.

My understanding of race in America came to me through lessons. The lessons that were taught to me, all by well meaning people, were attempts to shield me from internalizing hatred for the self. I learned at a very early age to question all things taught to me by white establishments - to watch what I learned in school, because they would tell me that Columbus was a hero, that the US was infallible, and that the only Negro worth knowing was Martin Luther King, Jr.

Here's an example of one such lesson:

White people have no history. They have spent their time on earth consumed with hatred and anger, releasing their hatred on the more civilized people of color, destroying empires and technological insights with their greed. They are inherently cruel and destructive.

Does that sound strange? Ridiculous even? How can a person reasonably claim that white people have no history, that an entire race of people are inherently cruel and destructive? It just doesn't make logical sense!

And yet, society perpetuates the same ideas. Society teaches that people of color have no history outside of slavery, or white dominance. If there were historic accomplishments made by people of color, they are not important enough to note in history books.

Think about your education.

How much do you know - that you learned in primary and secondary school - about the history of other nations? How much time did you focus on European history and American history? How did your curriculum treat African, Arabic, and Asian (including South East Asian) history? Did you get one year out of twelve devoted to learning about other nations? (I did - it was a course called Modern World History.)

Many Americans are unaware that our history is told from a skewed perspective. People of color only exist in the context of white people - slavery, the Opium Wars, the Alamo, the building of the Panama Canal...major history lessons are learned with white people at the forefront. With that type of world view, are we really surprised when people hold on to erroneous ideas like Blacks benefited from slavery?

Like a fencer, I learned to evaluate words and situations, to perceive threats, and then parry and thrust damaging white messages back at their senders. However, I soon discovered there is very little tolerance for race based assertions -negative or positive - in our world. We would rather pretend race

does not exist, save for a few cute cultural celebrations. I would go to my predominantly white school - a situation which changed as I got older - and hear the buzzwords. Diversity. Tolerance. Acceptance.

Active racial discourse is discouraged. You are admonished to keep any thoughts that could possibly be seen as divisive to yourself. So, you smile on and the thoughts still fester. You interact with your white coworkers, hear ideas, thoughts, and perceptions that conflict with your experience -but you say nothing. It is not your place. I am sure white people are doing the same thing - withholding the natural thoughts and questions that arise, and allowing biases and preconceptions to take up residence in your mind.

Eventually, thoughts turn into opinions. You listen to their perspectives, so very different from your own, and do not participate. You make friends, hang out after school, break bread, have sleepovers, get invited to bar mitzvahs - all the while realizing that there is a gulf that exists between your world and theirs.

For a while, I indulged all of my racist thoughts and ways of thinking. My best friend was white, but I did not trust her on a certain level. We shared everything - everything but what was important. We talked about school and friendships and assignments, but never did we discuss the OJ trial - which was a topic of discussion in seventh grade. We all knew where the quiet lines were drawn. I never told her about my family, and never discussed race or class. In high school, I started hanging out with other alternative black kids - my white friends began to fade into the background. One by one, I lost touch with them. A comment about Affirmative Action brought one friendship up short. Another friend moved abroad and fell in love with Germany - this, coupled with her growing Republican identity also created a rift in our communication.

Somewhere along the line, my feelings toward white people had solidified into outright avoidance. Their whiteness alienated me, because I could not see past it. Even when discussing ideas and concepts with my colleagues, there were lines I could not cross, conversations I did not want to venture into.

Exploring race with white people is quite often an exercise in futility. As most people do, we understand the world by forming a perspective from our experiences. It can be difficult to understand the weight of something that you have never personally experienced.

I stopped discussing race in high school, because I was disgusted at the shallow, parroted perspectives that were served up repeatedly as if they were unique thoughts.

I continued to stay away from those conversations in college, primarily because my interactions with white people had functionally ended. Outside of work, I no longer inhabited those kinds of social circles. My world was mixed and diverse, but lacking in white people. I had (and continued to have) friends from around the globe, of all experiences and languages and hues. But white people are missing.

Occasionally, I would become friendly with white people. Maybe on the job, maybe at a film club meeting, maybe someone I see everyday checking the mail.

Eventually, someone might broach the topic of race. (Normally, after checking out my site and looking at some of the blogs I write for, including this one.) Eventually, they would offer their perceptions on race in America:

“I think we need to stop looking at what divides us, and think about what unites us.”

A nice sentiment on its face, but it is also a highly effective method of shutting down the discussion of real issues. [Side note: can someone please tell the community of Jena to unite to get those kids out of jail?]

“People need to just realize that we’re an evolutionary blip on the radar screen. All of this black vs. white stuff is bullshit, and when we’re wiped out, it will be replaced by something else.”

One of my coworkers said this to me post-Imus debacle. Ironically, he made another comment while he was exploring moving down South. Visiting a prospective neighborhood in South Carolina, he was taken aback at the mistrust he encountered from the African-Americans in that community.

“They are looking at me like I did something wrong! I didn’t turn the hoses on anyone! I understand bad things happen, but we’re never going to get anywhere if people keep holding on to the past.”

Hey, like you said, it’s just a blip in society’s evolution. Brush it off.

Or one of my favorites:

“I think people (of color) need to stop trying to separate themselves so much from white society. You need to realize that we need to work together to get things done - you won’t get much accomplished without us.”

I almost had a Malcolm X moment. \* I had to step back from that conversation, and refrain from some kind of comment about white hubris.

As you can see, my attempts to foster a dialogue about race with non-PoCs has been a less than satisfying experience.

So why did I start to challenge my racist beliefs?

To be honest, I don’t know.

Refuting racist beliefs doesn’t really have any major benefits in society.

You don’t get a cookie.

You don't get a gold star for good work.

You don't even get your OJ prize.

What you do get is people treating you differently for not laughing at their racist jokes. You get to chastise yourself endlessly throughout the course of the day, trying to self-correct all the little racist thoughts that pop into your mind.

You get to have interactions that COMPLETELY JUSTIFY your racist thoughts and have to fight off those thoughts anyway.

It's a lot of work, trying to be less racist, trying to eradicate racism from yourself.

When I discovered Racialicious, I was at my most alienated. I was stuck on business in some depressed former mill town, over in the heartland of white America, with no other minorities in sight. That's when I first started listening to the podcast.

I was elated! Intelligent conversations about race, from different perspectives! And here was the best part - it was created by people of color. I could learn about issues in Asian America, Latin America, Arab America, I could hear about issues abroad, and communicate with other PoCs sharing their perspectives.

And yet - white people were here too. In the PoC space. I chafed. Then I decided to ignore it. Then I decided I couldn't ignore it because if people are here to learn about different perspectives, they should be allowed to. Then I wanted to ignore it, as it became clear that some white people on Racialicious want to inject their white viewpoint into the discussions, with no heed for understanding the points and issues raised.

So I was conflicted.

But as I continued reading, learning, growing - and eventually contributing my words and ideas to Racialicious - the growing irony of what I was doing was staring me in the face.

It's real hard to be an anti-racist activist if you're anti-white.

Post-adolescence, I had let go of a lot of my anger toward white people. But it was not until recently that I began to actively challenge my perceptions of white people. To work toward overcoming all the internalized prejudice I held. One day, I hope to be able to look at a group of white people and see people - not just run anthropological commentary in my head.

I made a conscious decision to work to overcome these racist perspectives. To listen to and try to understand where white people are coming from. To share experiences, rather than just talk at each other.

There may not be much of an incentive in our society to stop being racist.

But I suppose I prefer that to the alternative.

After all, who wants to be the kind of asshole that judges others on the color of their skin, rather than the content of their character?

\*For those interested, what came to mind was something similar to this quote:

It is not a case of our people . . . wanting either separation or integration. The use of these words actually clouds the real picture. The 22 million Afro-Americans don't seek either separation or integration. They seek recognition and respect as human beings.

—Malcolm X, "Kup's Show", Channel 7, TV, Chicago, aired 23 May 1964, FBI, MMI 100-41040