

1 WHITE MEN EXPOSE RACISM AS UNEARNED
2 BENEFITS AND PRIVILEGES FOR WHITES
3 AND LINGERING IMPOSITIONS FOR BLACKS

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7 RACISM CREATES SOCIAL ADVANTAGES AND
8 GLOBAL BENEFITS FOR WHITES - WHILE
9 DOWNGRADING and SUBJUGATING BLACKS

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13 African-Americans Suffer from Racism Exclusion and
14 Oppression - as White People Gain from Racism in all
15 Aspects of Life - So Black People need AARS
16 Reparations ASAP to Gain Equality in all Aspects of Life

1 evaluating me look like me they are white. I am one of them. I am not dangerous. Even when I
2 voice critical opinions, I am cut some slack; After all, I'm white.

3 My flaws are also more easily forgiven because I'm white. Some complain that affirmative action
4 has meant the university is straddled with mediocre minority professors. I have no doubt there are
5 minority faculty who are mediocre, though I don't know very many. As Henry Louis Gates Jr.
6 once pointed out, if affirmative action policies were in place for the next hundred years, it's
7 possible that at the end of that time the university could have as many mediocre minority
8 professors as it has mediocre white professors. That isn't meant as an insult to anyone, but it's a
9 simple observation that white privilege has meant that scores of second-rate white professors have
10 slid through the system, because their flaws were overlooked out of solidarity based on race, and
11 gender, class and ideology.

12 Some people resist the assertions that the United States is still a hypocritical bitter racist society,
13 and that racism has real effects on black and white people. But white folks have long cut other
14 white folks a break. I know, because I am one of them. I am not a genius - as I like to say, I'm not
15 the sharpest knife in the drawer. I have been teaching full time for six years and I've published a
16 reasonable amount of scholarship. Some of it is the unexceptional stuff one churns out to get
17 tenure, and some of it, I would argue, whether or not it is worth reading.

18 I worked hard, and I like to think that I'm a fairly decent teacher. Every once in a while, I leave
19 my office at the end of the day feeling like I really accomplished something. When I cash my
20 paycheck, I don't feel guilty. But, all that said, I know I did not get where I am by merit alone. I
21 benefited from among other things especially white privilege. That doesn't mean I don't deserve
22 my job, or that if I weren't white, I would never have gotten the job. It simply means that all
23 through my life, I have soaked up benefits for being white, and blacks have been discriminated
24 against and suffered dire consequences and damages based on the color of their skin for hundreds
25 of years, and that should be rectified with reparations.

26 All my life I have been hired for jobs by white people. I was accepted for graduate school by white
27 people. Then I was hired for a teaching position by the predominantly white University of Texas,
28 headed by a white president, in a college headed by a white dean, and in a department with a white
29 chairman, which at the time had one nonwhite tenured professor. I have worked hard to get where
30 I am, and I work hard to stay there. But to feel good about myself, and my work, I do not have to
31 believe that "merit" as defined by white people in a white country, alone got me here. I can
32 acknowledge that in addition to all that hard work, I got a significant boost from white privilege.
33 At one time in my life, I would not have been able to say that, because I needed to believe my
34 success in life was due solely to my individual talent and effort. I saw myself as the heroic
35 American, the rugged individualist. I was so deeply seduced by the culture's mythology and reality
36 of racism/white supremacy, that I couldn't see the fear that was binding me to those ideals.

37 Like all White Americans, I was living with the fear that maybe I didn't really deserve my success,
38 that maybe luck and privilege had more to do with it than brains and hard work. I was afraid I

1 wasn't heroic or rugged, that I wasn't special. I let go of some of that fear when I realized that,
2 indeed, I wasn't special but that I was still me. What I do well, I can still take pride in, even when
3 I know the rules under which I work are still stacked to my benefit. Until we let go of the fiction
4 that people have complete control over their fate - that we can will ourselves to be anything we
5 choose - then we will live with that fear.

6
7 White privilege is not something I get to decide whether I want to keep. Every time I walk into the
8 store at the same time as a black man, and the security guard follows him and leaves me alone to
9 shop, I am benefiting from white privilege. There is not space here to list all the ways in which
10 white privilege plays out in our daily lives, but it is clear that I will carry this privilege with me
11 until the day racism/white supremacy is erased from this society.

12 More Thoughts on why the System of Racism/White-Supremacy/Privilege is Wrong:

13 White privilege shapes the United States: By writing about the policies of white privilege, and
14 listening to folks who responded to that article, I have had to face the facts that privilege runs deep
15 in my life, and it makes me uncomfortable. The discomfort tells me I might be on the right track.
16 As a result of that article, I find a variety of folks who want to talk about racism. I learned not only
17 facts about my own privileges, but more facts about why many white folks can't come to terms
18 with the truism I offer in that article: White people, whether overtly racist or not, benefit from
19 living in a world mostly run by white people, that has been built on the land and the backs of black
20 people.

21 The reactions varied from racist rantings, to deeply felt expressions of pain and anger, to
22 declarations of solidarity. But probably the most important response I got was from, black people,
23 who said something, like this: "Of course there is white privilege. I've been pointing it out to my
24 white friends and co-workers for years. It is not funny that no one listens to me, but everyone takes
25 notice when a white guy says it".

26 My voice gets heard in large part because I am a white man with a Ph.D. at the U of Texas who
27 holds a professional job with status. In most settings, I speak with the assumption that people will
28 not only listen, but will take me seriously. I speak with the assumption that my motive will not be
29 challenged; I can rely on the perception of me as a neutral authority, someone whose observations
30 can be trusted.

31 Every time I open my mouth, I draw on, and in some ways reinforce, my privilege, which is in
32 large part tied to race. Right now, I want to use that privilege to acknowledge the many black
33 people who took time to tell me about the enduring realities of racism in the United States. Then
34 I want to talk to white people who misunderstand my intentions, which are well and lean towards
35 truth and reconciliation for African-American reparations.

36 Responses of my white critics came in these four basic categories around the following thoughts:

1 1. White privilege doesn't exist because affirmative action has made being white a
2 disadvantage. Response: Extremely limited attempts to combat racism, such as affirmative action,
3 do virtually nothing to erase the white privilege built over 500 years that pervades our society. As
4 a friend of mine says, the only disadvantage to being white is that it often prevents white people
5 from being honest about unearned benefits from racism/white supremacy.

6 2. White privilege does exist, but it can't be changed because it is natural for any group to
7 favor its own, and besides, the worst manifestations of racism are over. Response: This approach
8 makes human choices appear outside of human control, which is a dodge to avoid moral and
9 political responsibility to do something about the injustice of white privilege, inflicted upon
10 blacks.

11 3. White privilege does exist, and it is not good because Europeans claimed to have civilized
12 the world. Along the way bad things have happened, and we should take care to be nice to blacks
13 to make up for that by awarding them reparations. Response: These folks often argued the
14 curiously but familiar contradictory position that (1) blacks and their culture are not inferior, but
15 (2) white/European culture is superior. As for the claimed civilizing effect of Europe, we might
16 consider five centuries of inhumane brutal colonialism, and World Wars I and II, and then ask
17 what civilized means. White privilege has created a plethora of problems for black people in the
18 form of major and extensive damages, which requires reparations to repair that devastation and
19 damage.

20 4. White Privilege exists, because whites are inherently superior, and I am a weakling and
21 traitor for suggesting otherwise. Response: The Klan isn't dead and racism is alive and gaining
22 ground. So, I cannot, and indeed should not, feel either guilty or proud about being white, because
23 it is a state of being I have no control over. However, as a member of society-I have an obligation
24 not simply to enjoy the privilege that comes with being white, but to study and understand it, and
25 work towards a more just world in which such unearned privilege is eventually eliminated.

27 Some of my critics said that such a goal is ridiculous; after all, people have unearned privileges of
28 all kinds. Several people pointed that out, for example, tall people have unearned privilege in
29 basketball, and we don't ask tall people to stop playing basketball nor do we eliminate their
30 advantage.

31 The obvious difference is that racial categories are invented; they carry real privileges for whites
32 and serious disadvantages for blacks, only because people of power create and maintain the
33 privileges for themselves at the expense of others. The privileges are rooted in violence and
34 maintained through racist institutions and systems, in addition to less dominant but hypocritical
35 democracy.

36 It would be a drab and boring world if we eliminated individual differences, but we can work
37 with others to change the world to erase the effects of differences, that have been created by one

1 group to keep others down. So, I don't feel guilty about being white in a white supremacist
2 society, but I feel an especially strong moral obligation to engage in collective political activity
3 to try to change the society, because I benefit from the injustice that has developed in our nation.
4 It takes only a bit of empathy to listen and a bit of courage to act.

5 Exploring the Depths of Racism and Racist Socialization 6 By Tim Wise

7 Every now and then a lesson comes easy. Other times we learn things by accident, if at all. Yet,
8 inevitably it seems, the lessons that matter most, often come from the least likely sources, and at
9 the most inopportune moments. So much so, that if we aren't paying close attention, we'll miss
10 them altogether. Such was the case last August when my paternal grandmother died, at the age of
11 78. Although the passing of a relative may seem hardly appropriate as the jumping off point for a
12 political commentary, it is precisely the oddity of it, which makes it all the more poignant and
13 valuable. But first, a slight preface to what I'm trying to explain.

14
15 In the past few years, I have had the good fortune to speak before nearly 60,000 people, in 40
16 states, on over 150 college campuses, and to dozens of community groups, labor unions, and
17 government agencies about racism. Some audiences respond favorably, others not so much. But
18 the message I deliver is always the same: those persons called "white" have a particular obligation
19 to fight racism because it is our problem, created in its modern form by us, for the purpose of
20 commanding power over resources, and opportunities at the expense of black people. Furthermore,
21 all whites, irrespective of their liberal attitudes, "tolerance" for others, and decent voting records,
22 have to address the internalized beliefs about white supremacy which hurts whites and blacks. No
23 one is innocent. No one is unaffected by the daily socialization to which we are all subjected;
24 specifically with regard to the way we are taught to think about African-Americans in society
25 today: their behaviors, lifestyles, intelligence, beauty, and so on.

26
27 Without question, convincing white folks particularly those dear liberals who insist every other
28 friend they have is black; that they too have internalized racist beliefs, even of a most vicious kind,
29 is the most difficult task in discussing racism. You can't prove the point with statistics, or poll
30 numbers, or by pointing out the wide spread disparities in life chances that form the backdrop of
31 American institutionalized racism excluding blacks from equality. Convinced that they are free
32 from the biases, stereotypes, and behaviors that characterize "real" racists, such persons inevitably
33 seem the most resistant to the analysis offered here thus far.

34
35 It is with this in mind that I return to my grandmother. For her death and more to the point, her
36 life, right up until she died; offers more in the way of proof that racist socialization affects us all
37 more than anything we expected or experienced.

38
39 You see my grandmother was one of those good liberals. In fact, in many ways she was beyond
40 liberal, particularly given the time and place in which she spent most of her life. Born in the Detroit

1 area, she and her parents moved south in the 1920s. Her father was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.
2 A member that is, until the day in 1938 when his only daughter informed him that she had fallen
3 in love with a non-white man, and that in addition to that, his hatred of blacks was unacceptable
4 and unconscionable to her.

5
6 She then handed him his KKK robes, and with her mother's approval, asked whether he was going
7 to burn them, or if she was going to have to do it herself. She challenged him despite what must
8 have been the palpable fear of standing up to a man who was none too gentle, and most certainly
9 capable of violence. As it turns out, he would never attend another Klan meeting, and by all
10 accounts changed his attitudes, changed his behaviors, indeed, changed his life to accept blacks as
11 equals.

12
13 Throughout her life she would stand up to racist bigotry on a number of other occasions:
14 threatening to commit vehicular homicide on a real estate agent who sought to enforce restrictive
15 covenants laws in her family's chosen Nashville neighborhood; standing up to racist comments
16 whenever she heard them, from friends, family members, or total strangers. The fear which often
17 paralyzes whites and makes us unwilling to challenge racism--described by James Baldwin as the
18 fear of being "turned away from the welcome table" of white society--was something that played
19 no part in her life. She was a woman of principle, and although not an activist, in her own way
20 she nonetheless instilled in her children and grandchildren a sense of right and wrong which was
21 unshakeable in this regard. She is in no small part responsible for who I am and what I do today.
22 But enough of the praise. Heaping accolades on the dead is not my intention here. For there is
23 another part of this story which is less heartwarming, and yet more instructive and important than
24 anything written in this teaching. It is the part about my grandmother's death.

25
26 A few years ago, it became obvious that Maw Maw, as we knew her, was developing the
27 Alzheimer's disease at a fairly rapid pace. Anyone who has watched a loved one suffer with this
28 condition knows how difficult it is to witness the deterioration that takes place. The forgotten
29 memories come first. Then the forgotten names. Then the unfamiliar faces. Then the terror and
30 anger of feeling abandoned. And finally, a regression back to a virtual infant stage of development,
31 complete with the sucking in of one's lips so typical of newborns. It is a fascinating disease, in that
32 it renders otherwise healthy persons helpless, eventually causing not only a mental meltdown, but
33 a physiological one as well. It renders its victims' incapable of reason or comprehensible thought.
34 It saps the conscious mind of its energy, and therein lays the point of my story.

35
36 You see resisting the weight of one's socialization requires conscious thought. It requires the
37 existence of the ability to choose. And near the end of my grandmother's life, as her body and
38 mind began to shut down at an ever-increasing pace, this consciousness--the soundness of mind
39 which had led her to fight the pressures to accept racism--began to vanish. Her awareness of who
40 she was and what she had stood for her entire life disappeared. Now as this process unfolded,
41 culminating in the dementia ward of a local nursing home, an amazing and disturbing thing

1 happened. She began to refer to her mostly black nurses by the all-too common term, which forms
2 the cornerstone of white America's racial thinking. The one Malcolm X said was the first word
3 newcomers learned when they came to this country, Nigger. A word she would never have uttered
4 from conscious thought, but one that remained locked away in her subconscious; despite her best
5 intentions and lifelong commitment to standing strong against racism. A word that would have
6 made her ill even to think it. A word that would make her violent if she heard it said. A word
7 which, for her to utter herself, would have made her, well, another person altogether. But there it
8 was, as ugly, and bitter, and fluently expressed as it probably ever had been by her father.

9
10 Think carefully about what I'm saying. And why it matters. Here was a woman who no longer
11 could recognize her own children; a woman who had no idea who her husband had been; no clue
12 where she was, what her name was, what year it was-and yet, knew what she had been taught at a
13 very early age to call black people. Once she was no longer capable of resisting this demon, tucked
14 away like a ticking time bomb in the far comers of her mind, it reasserted itself, and exploded with
15 a vengeance. She could not remember how to feed herself, for God's sake. She could not go to the
16 bathroom by herself. She could not recognize a glass of water for what it was. But she could
17 recognize a nigger. America had seen to that--and no disease was going to strip her of that memory.
18 Indeed, it would be one of the last words she would say, before she finally stopped talking at all.

19
20 Please understand my point: Given this woman's entire life, and the circumstances surrounding
21 her slow demise, her utterance of a word even as vicious as nigger says absolutely nothing about
22 her. But it speaks volumes about her country. About the seeds of pure evil planted deep in every
23 one of us by our American culture; seeds, which--so long as we are of sound mind and
24 commitment-we can, choose not to water.

25
26 But also seeds that left untended sprouts of their own accord. It speaks volumes about the work
27 white folks must do, individually and collectively to overcome that which is always beneath the
28 surface; to overcome the tendency to cash in the chips which represent the perquisites of whiteness;
29 to traffic in privileges--not the least of which is the privilege of feeling superior to others not
30 because of what or who they are, but rather because of what you're not: in this case, not a nigger.
31 In so many ways that's all racism ever meant, and all it needed to mean for those of European
32 descent. To be white meant at least you were above them.

33
34 If you had not a pot to piss in, at least you had that. To call another man or woman a nigger and to
35 treat them the way one is instructed to treat such an untouchable is to assert nothing less than a
36 property right. It is to add value to what DuBois called the "psychological influence" of whiteness.
37 When my grandmother was strong and vibrant, she had no need to take advantage of these
38 influences, and indeed, often tried hard to resist them. But in weakness and confusion it became
39 all to clear that her increasingly diseased mind had left. And she called in the racist chips.
40

1 Maybe all this is why I'm so tired of other white folks trying to sell me bullcrap like: "I don't have
2 a racist bone in my body," or "I never notice color." See, Maw Maw would have said that too. And
3 she would have meant well. But she would have been wrong.
4

5 The fact is that nigger is still the first word on most white people's mind when they see a black
6 man being taken off to jail on the evening news. The first thing we think when we see Mike Tyson,
7 Louis Farrakhan, or O.J. Simpson (as in "that murdering nigger"). Think I'm exaggerating? Then
8 come with me to America's airports and have a drink with me at the bar the next time an African-
9 American other than Oprah, Michael Jordan, or Colin Powell makes the news. Take a cab ride
10 with me anywhere in this country, and if the driver is white (or really anything but black), and the
11 trip takes more than 15 minutes, see how long it takes for the word or its modern-day coded
12 equivalents to spew forth from their mouth, once they find out what I do.
13

14 Ask me what white folks yelled at black students who occupied the basketball court during a
15 Rutgers/U. Mass game a few years back to protest racist comments by the Rutgers' President. Fans
16 who for mere seconds before had been wildly cheering for black basketball players, and yet could
17 and did turn on a dime as soon as they were reminded of the racial battle lines which trump NCAA
18 inspired brotherhood every time. And then after that, tell me the once again about being colorblind.
19 Let's go to Roxbury tonight, or Southcentral LA, or to the Forsaken housing projects in New
20 Orleans, or to any MLK Boulevard in any city in America, and then let's see how hard it is to spot
21 melanin. Color blind my foot.
22

23 Then once we're all through feeling bad for having been sucker-punched by racist conditioning
24 just like everyone else, then please, for the love of God, let's learn to forgive ourselves. Our guilt
25 is worthless, although, it should be said, far from meaningless. It has plenty of meaning: it means
26 we aren't likely to do a dog gone thing constructive to end the system which took us in, conned us,
27 and stole part of our humanity. And what those women at my grandmother's nursing home need
28 and deserve--much more than a sniveling apology from embarrassed family members--is for me
29 to say what I'm saying right now, and to encourage everyone to be brave enough to say the same
30 thing. To put an end to this vicious system of racism, to spend every day resisting the temptations
31 of white privilege, which ultimately weakens the communities on which we all depend. Those
32 nurses knew, and so do I why my grandmother could no longer fight. For the rest of us, there is
33 no similar excuse available. We can and should ask prominent Black, White, and Jewish Scholars
34 to participate in AAIU Racism Dialogue to help slowly dissolve racism and white privilege in
35 America, and the AAIU Truth and Reconciliation Process (T&R Process), to assess damages
36 caused by racism/white supremacy, in order to produce a fair African-American Reparations
37 Package to repair those damages.
38

39 Appreciating Honest White Scholars,
40 Brotha Pruitt
41