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This week, a staff member accused a colleague of being racist, sparking a deep dive into the murky waters of bias. Questions like "Can Black people be racist?" and "How often do we confuse actions like stereotyping or microaggressions with racism?" bubbled to the surface. These terms often get tangled up, so let's break them down with a bit of help from Urban Dictionary:

- **Stereotype:** A generalized truth about a particular culture or group.
- **Microaggression:** Everyday verbal or nonverbal slights or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate derogatory messages targeting people based on their marginalized group membership. Microaggressions can include:
 - **Microassaults:** Direct, intentional discriminatory actions.
 - **Microinsults:** Subtle verbal or nonverbal communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity.
 - **Microinvalidations:** Communications that subtly exclude or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.

For example, asking a less experienced white counterpart to clarify something a Black boss said is a microinvalidation. This particular one bothers many professionals more than others. As a Black woman, being knowledgeable and accountable is a point of pride.

Racism: Desiring to benefit from the oppression of others, especially maliciously or at the detriment of other races.

Understanding implicit bias is crucial. Everyone must examine their roots and the mindsets they inherited. Descendants of slavery in the South, for instance, must recognize the unintended consequences of that history. Non-people of color must also scrutinize their backgrounds. If visible disparities and differences upset someone, it's a personal issue. In a country built on the backs of immigrants, including whites and Blacks, what's understood doesn't need explanation.

Upon closer examination, what seemed like perceived racism often turns out to be advocacy for Black and Brown professionals and clients. In the professional world, judgment and stereotyping are common experiences. However, it's essential to acknowledge participation in these behaviors. For instance, when encountering a Black hoodie and the scent of marijuana, instant negative thoughts may arise, but awareness and self-checking are crucial. This behavior doesn't make someone a bad person; it makes them an honest person.

Advocacy for marginalized communities becomes a personal responsibility. Fighting for Deaf people of color, for example, highlights how professionals in this field often have low expectations for these students. Having a deaf Black brother makes this fight personal. Fighting harder for students of color becomes necessary because of the treatment they receive. Novice professionals don't get the same opportunities, and children are often educated to fill roles like stockers as their first or only option, which shouldn't be the case.

Once again the John Lewis's quote, "If not you, then who? If not now, then when?" resonates deeply. The consensus is clear: bias toward one's people stems from a personal connection to the struggles they face. They are the sisters, brothers, mothers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents who had no one to stand up for them. They are the descendants of 400 years of slavery and countless years of discrimination. *The question isn't whether someone is racist but whether the discomfort with advocacy stems from racist ideologies.*



Recipe of the Week: Fresh Start Chili Pie

- Ingredients:**
- 1 lb ground beef (or turkey for a lighter option)
 - 1 large onion, chopped
 - 1 green bell pepper, chopped
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1 can (15 oz) kidney beans, drained and rinsed
 - 1 can (10 oz) Ro-Tel diced tomatoes and green chilies
 - 1 can (6 oz) tomato paste
 - 1 cup beef broth (or water)
 - 1 packet McCormick taco seasoning
 - 1 teaspoon Tony Chachere's Cajun Seasoning
 - 1 teaspoon onion powder
 - 1 teaspoon garlic powder
 - 1 bag of Doritos (Nacho Cheese or any preferred flavor)
 - 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
 - Optional toppings: sour cream, chopped green onions, jalapeños, diced tomatoes
- Instructions:**
1. In a large pot or Dutch oven, season the ground beef with Tony Chachere's Cajun Seasoning, onion powder, and garlic powder. Brown the seasoned meat over medium-high heat until fully cooked. Drain any excess fat to remove grease.
 2. Add the chopped onion, bell pepper, and minced garlic to the pot. Cook until the vegetables are tender, about 5 minutes.
 3. Add the McCormick taco seasoning to the meat and vegetable mixture. Cook for another 2 minutes to let the spices bloom.
 4. Add the kidney beans, Ro-Tel diced tomatoes (with juice), tomato paste, and beef broth. Stir well to combine.
 5. Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and let it simmer for at least 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. For deeper flavor, let it simmer for an hour or more.
 6. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary.
 7. To serve, layer a generous handful of Doritos in the bottom of each serving bowl. Spoon the hot chili over the chips.
 8. Top with shredded cheddar cheese and your favorite optional toppings such as sour cream, chopped green onions, jalapeños, or diced tomatoes.

Understanding and addressing implicit bias is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable community. Stand up for marginalized groups, educate yourself and others, and challenge the status quo. If not you, then who? If not now, then when?
Remember, a fresh start can begin with a simple dish and a shift in perspective. So, why not enjoy some Fresh Start Chili Pie while contemplating ways to make a difference in your community?

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