

The Subtle Faces of Racism: Energy, Dismissal, and the Harm of Smug Attitudes

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Racism is not always loud. It does not always shout slurs or fly flags of hate. Sometimes, it shows up in the smallest gestures—a smug look, a dismissive shrug, an ignored presence, or a refusal to reciprocate energy. These quiet acts of superiority may seem minor to those who commit them, but for those on the receiving end, they are heavy with meaning. They say: you are less than, you do not belong, you are not worthy of my respect.

When someone is ignored or dismissed because of their race, it is not just a matter of rudeness. It is a denial of equal **humanity**. Racism can exist in how we treat one another in everyday exchanges: withholding acknowledgment, refusing to meet someone's energy, or showing up with an attitude that communicates condescension or hostility. These moments strip people of their dignity, **regardless of whether they are Black, White, Asian, Latino, Indigenous, or from any other background.**

Microaggressions—subtle, everyday slights or dismissals—reinforce inequality by sending signals of exclusion. A smug look across a room, an eye roll, a tone laced with superiority, or the choice to ignore someone's contribution may not leave a physical scar, but it can create an invisible wound. Over time, these repeated acts can make people question their worth, drain their energy, and instill feelings of alienation.

“Crazy-making” compounds this harm. When someone who experiences such treatment speaks up, they may be told they are overreacting, imagining things, or being “too sensitive.” This denial not only silences them but forces them to carry the weight of both the injury and the disbelief. It is a cycle of harm that erodes trust and reinforces division.

Racism, in any form and against any group, thrives on these subtle acts as much as on blatant discrimination. The result is the same: people are excluded, devalued, and made to feel invisible. And when this behavior is tolerated, it quietly upholds systemic inequities by draining the energy of those who already face barriers to belonging.

To move toward justice, we must expand our understanding of racism beyond its overt forms. It is not enough to avoid slurs or violence; we must also reject the smug looks, dismissive attitudes, and energy imbalances that erode human dignity. Every interaction carries the potential to either build bridges of respect or walls of exclusion.

True equality means recognizing every person's humanity—acknowledging them, reciprocating their presence, and showing respect. Racism in any form, toward anyone, is unacceptable. By paying attention to the subtle ways it shows up, we can begin to dismantle its quiet power and create a culture where all people are truly seen, heard, and valued.

A Spiritual Call to Action

As people of faith, we are reminded that every human being is created in the image of God. The smug look, the dismissive tone, or the act of ignoring another is not only a slight against that person—it is a slight against the Creator who made them. Scripture calls us to love one another, to be slow to anger, and to honor the dignity of all people.

Forgiveness is part of this path, ***but forgiveness does not mean tolerating harmful behaviors***. It means creating boundaries strong enough to protect the community, while offering grace for change. As the Union of Saints teaches, we must serve our communities with profound care and boundaries, ensuring that racism in any form—whether quiet or loud—is not allowed to fester.

Our calling is to build a community where respect is the foundation, dignity is non-negotiable, and every person is seen as a beloved child of God. In doing so, we not only reject racism but embody the love and justice that our faith demands.

A Universal Prayer Against Subtle Racism

Dear Creator,

We come before You with open hearts, asking for Your guidance.

Teach us to see how racism does not always shout, but sometimes whispers—

in smug looks, in rolling eyes, in silence when someone should be seen,

in dismissing voices that deserve to be heard.

Help us recognize that ignoring someone's presence,

withholding kindness, or refusing to share energy

is not harmless.

It makes people feel small, invisible, and unloved.

We know this is not Your way.

Give us wisdom to understand

that every person carries Your light within them.

When we look down on another,

we are turning away from that light.

When we dismiss or ignore,

we are rejecting the dignity You gave them.

Protect us from “crazy-making” and gaslighting—
the kind of harm that makes people question their worth.

Instead, help us to build trust,
to listen with open ears,
and to honor each other’s truth.

We pray for courage:
to reject smugness,
to reject dismissal,
to reject any act that makes another feel less than.

We pray for strength:
to stand up for what is right,
even in the small, quiet moments
where love and respect matter most.

And we pray for healing:
that those who have been hurt by subtle racism
may know their worth is not defined by others,
but by Your eternal love.

Help us, Lord, to create a world where everyone is seen,
everyone is heard,
and everyone is valued—
no exceptions.

Amen.