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INVITED PAPER

Black Lives Matter, and Yes, You are Racist: The Parallelism of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

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Abstract

The United States of America is at a crossroads, one that we have been at before. This is not the first time that we have battled a pandemic while experiencing an economic downturn, state sanctioned violence and racial terror against Blacks, the boiling over of racial tensions encouraged by the president of the United States, and a movement focused on forcing America to reckon with its endemic racism, anti-Blackness, and state-sanctioned violence against Blacks. This article provides a brief overview of that history and its striking parallel to what is happening today. It pushes White social workers to understand how they are beneficiaries of racism. It reminds social workers of their ethical obligation to be change agents. Finally, it provides basic suggestions for those who are willing to see their complicity and are still willing to work on dismantling the injustice that impacts Black people in America.

Keywords Black Lives Matter · State-sanctioned violence · Pandemic · Racism · Privilege · Anti-Black

Many Black people are experiencing today's events while remembering the childhood stories they heard from their parents or grandparents about a child, sibling, spouse, or friend who died during the Spanish Flu. Others are recalling family traditions attributed to surviving the Great Depression. The American tradition of the family heading out to the open road for a summer vacation has also had a resurgence due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mzezewa, 2020). However for many Black people, road trips serve as a reminder of times when driving south to visit relatives meant being fearful of what danger you might encounter from the police, while driving to your destination, or local Whites who did not want you stopping in their town to get food, gas, use the restroom, or spend the night (Mzezewa, 2020). For others, such as activists during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is invigorating. Representative John Lewis, inspired by protesters and supportive of the movement said, "We must use our time and our space on this little planet that we call Earth to make a lasting contribution, to leave it a little better than we found it, and now that need is greater than ever before" (Capehart, 2020, para 13).

Each of those experiences is like a piece of a complicated puzzle. Social workers must understand that Blacks in America are "both creatures and creators of history in that history has placed them where they are right now and has shaped their point of view, their identity, and their aspirations" (Martin & Martin, 1995, p. 252). History is the foundation for every person's life story. However, consider the exhaustion that you might feel if you heard those childhood stories, have those childhood memories, and believed they would never be repeated. Except now, you are reminded of them every day because the current state of our society is mirroring the past.

The first part of 2020 might be conceptualized as a twenty-first century confluence, into a matter of months, of the Spanish Flu (1918–1920), the Red Summer of 1919, the Great Depression (1929–1939), and the Civil Rights movement (1950s–1960s). Individually each crisis is cause for distress, but conflated into a few months, they have created overwhelming feelings of turmoil. Blacks were disproportionately impacted by each phenomenon then, only months into this decade history is repeating itself, Blacks are yet again being disproportionately impacted.

We are living in unprecedented times that are remarkably parallel to the last century. Thus, understanding the history of

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Black people in America, can create sensitivity to their experiences and an understanding of how their past and present are parallel (Martin & Martin, 1995). Embedded in that parallelism is a snowball, which keeps rolling down a mountain and growing larger with each rotation. However, the problem is not just the snowball. It is the accompanying avalanche that created it, and the rapidity at which both are moving and seemingly focused on destroying all the gains Black people thought had been accomplished during the twentieth century.

As social workers living through and witnessing today's events it could be easy to feel overwhelmed and not know where to begin. It might also be possible to be so enthusiastic and eager to get involved that a thoughtful, informed approach is not used. To be effective, good intentions are not enough; they are also often misguided. You must consider what not to do, plus what to do. You must also understand your responsibility and opportunity as an educator, practitioner, researcher, or policymaker. You must be prepared to do more than just read the latest best seller, join a book club, post on Facebook, and Tweet your opinions. You must be active and do something. The first step to doing is learning and in this case learning the history of Black people in America.

This article begins with a very brief overview of historical events, the parallel between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and impact on Blacks in the United States. Second is a reminder of our responsibilities as social workers to be change agents, in particular how that charge is embedded in our code of ethics and educational standards. The last three sections, although written to specifically address White social workers, are useful for everyone as either new information or a much-needed refresher. Therefore, third, is a review of basic definitions that should be understood before taking on the role of change agent during our current times. Fourth are clear recommendations about *what not to do* because engaging in those actions would be counterproductive to the goal. Finally, are suggestions for *what to do* in your particular social work role.

This article purposely approaches this topic with Black people at its core, and their experiences with White people in the United States. This is not to diminish the experiences of, or relationships with, other groups of people in this country. It is however an acknowledgement of the continuing perpetuation of anti-Black attitudes infused into this country and how their creation and legacy are based in the original relationship between Whites and Blacks: *we-them*.

Twentieth Century

World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, was still being fought when many Black World War I veterans returned home. They had answered the call and risked their lives to secure American freedom and democracy. What they had not secured was their own freedom and upon return they experienced the same denial of rights and opportunities they had encountered before leaving (Bates, 2019). Their status as a war veteran meant nothing beyond their community and race alone continued to define their identity.

Spanish Flu of 1918–1920

Between 1918 and 1920, the world was overwhelmed by the Spanish Flu, the deadliest disease outbreak in modern history, with deaths totaling more than 50 million; 675,000 were from the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; McDonald, 2020). At the start of the pandemic, Blacks were experiencing longstanding barriers to health care access, as well as higher overall rates of mortality and morbidity than their White counterparts (Gamble, 2010). Blacks lived in segregated housing, which seemed to initially limit the exposure of Blacks to the virus, thus fewer deaths (Gamble, 2010). However, they were often left to take care of themselves and when they received care it was substandard taking place in basements and inadequately supported segregated hospitals (McDonald, 2020). By the end of the pandemic, Whites had higher rates of morbidity, yet Blacks experienced higher rates of mortality (Økland & Mamelund, 2019).

Notably, the Spanish Flu also began as the Great Migration, which started in 1916, was growing and racial tensions between Whites and Blacks throughout the country were heightening. Those existing tensions were exacerbated further by the ongoing promulgation of theories of Black racial inferiority attributed to their biology, physiology, and morality (Gamble, 2010). The result was a reign of terror on Blacks, by groups supported by local law enforcement, like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), who had been revived in 1915 (Greenberg, 2009). They dragged Black men, women, and children from their beds and lynched them: they were mutilated, burned, beat, tortured, dismembered, and murdered (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017, 2020; Greenberg, 2009). Those lynchings were commonly advertised and conducted in White communities as family entertainment (Greenberg, 2009). Beyond advertising, souvenirs or mementos were also created. For example, on August 7, 1930 a photo was taken by Lawrence Beitler at the lynchings of teenagers, Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, in Marion, Indiana. Their lynchings occurred before a crowd estimated in size to be 5000, including women and children (Rozen-Wheeler, 2017). Between 1877 and 1950 more than 4400 Blacks, men, women, and children were lynched by Whites (Brown, 2020).

Fueling the Great Migration were companies recruiting Black workers from the south with free train fare, better wages, and promises of a kinder environment than the Jim Crow south (Rehagen, 2017). To prevent Blacks from

leaving the south, wide-ranging strategies were implemented. For those recruiting Blacks to move, severe fines were employed, which were often too high to pay so the consequence was jailing and peonage (Anderson, 2017). Trains that were moving goods to help the war effort were even stopped in hopes of negatively impacting the railroad industry because of its role in helping to relocate Blacks to the north (Anderson, 2017). Whites viewed their efforts as necessary because Blacks who were leaving in droves were causing the socioeconomic structure of the south to approach collapse (Anderson, 2017).

White northerners were threatened by the relocation and employment of Blacks because Blacks were viewed as a threat to their own job security. For example, in 1917 in East St. Louis, Illinois, the Aluminum Ore Company brought Blacks in to break the strike of their existing White laborers (O'Neil, 2014, para. 14). That action led to 3000 White workers protesting and was the beginning of what became known as the East St. Louis Massacre of 1917 (Brown, 2020). News reports in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch described White mobs as murdering every Black man in sight (Brown, 2020). "Black skin was a death warrant" (O'Neil, 2014). Some Blacks managed to escape to St. Louis, Missouri via the Eads Bridge which connected East St. Louis to St. Louis (Rehagen, 2017). However, the police eventually shut down the bridge forcing many Blacks to try, not always successfully, to swim across the Mississippi River (Keyes, 2017). The murder spree lasted three days and nights; the reported death toll, although likely under-reported by hundreds, was 39 Blacks and 9 Whites (Brown, 2020). According to newspaper accounts, Blacks were murdered with callousness; Black men could be seen raising their hands, pleading for their lives, and having their cries ignored (Brown, 2020). White women beat and stoned Black women as they begged "for mercy" (Brown, 2020, para 5). The National Guard, who had been called in to monitor the strike, remained in town and stood by silently, watching, joining, and encouraging the White mobs to commit violence (McLaughlin, 2002).

Red Summer of 1919

Those acts of terror became normal and by the summer of 1919, the relentless oppression of and discrimination towards Blacks, the continued growth of the KKK, and the impact of the pandemic, converged into months of nationwide anti-Black violence known as the Red Summer of 1919 (Bates, 2019). Violence broke out nationwide between Blacks and Whites including in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Houston (Bates, 2019). In Chicago, when Blacks attempted to move into certain neighborhoods, Whites regularly assaulted them and bombed their homes (Rothstein, 2017; Spear, 1967). Between 1917 and 1921 in Chicago, 58 bombs were dropped on the homes of Blacks, as well as White and Black real estate agents who sold to Blacks looking to leave Black neighborhoods; 30 of those bombings occurred during a six-month period in 1919 in one concentrated area (Rothstein, 2017; Schlabach, 2010).Throughout the country the majority of those injured, killed, or left homeless were Black (Wormser, 2002a). This period of concentrated racial terror reigned upon Blacks in 26 cities and lasted until 1923 when the all-Black town of Rosewood, Florida was destroyed (Brown, 2020); the end result was 78 lynchings (Anderson, 2017).

In some instances, such as the Tulsa Massacre of 1921, local authorities supplied White mobs with firearms and ammunition (Equal Justice Initiative, 2020). That instance of racial terror was the destruction of the Greenwood community, a thriving Black business district commonly known as Black Wall Street, which resulted in the death of at least 36 Black Tulsans (Equal Justice Initiative, 2020). White mobs, indiscriminately shot Blacks, burned their homes and buildings, and dropped firebombs on the area (Equal Justice Initiative, 2020; Fain, 2017). Eventually the Oklahoma National Guard was called into quell the "Negro uprising" and arrest Black survivors; no Whites were punished or prosecuted, and over 10,000 Blacks were displaced (Equal Justice Initiative, 2020). Thus, Blacks who managed to survive the pandemic, still had to live in a world enveloped by anti-Black, state-supported violence.

The Great Depression (1929–1939)

The Great Depression began with a stock market crash in 1929 and lasted until 1939. The overall unemployment rate skyrocketed from 33% in 1931 to 50% in 1932 (Greenberg, 2009). It became common for Blacks, who were working low-wage jobs (Greenberg, 2009) to be fired from jobs traditionally reserved for them because Whites were seeking new employment after losing their better paying positions (Library of Congress, n.d.; Wormser, 2002b). Thus, in some urban centers, their unemployment rates rose extraordinarily high, such as in Detroit (60%), Philadelphia (60%) Atlanta (70%), Memphis (75%), and Norfolk (80%; Greenberg, 2009). When White men could not find jobs, many ambushed and killed Black men and took their jobs (Wormser, 2002b). For Blacks, the aftereffects of the Great Depression lasted for decades and led to the founding of organizations like the National Council for Negro Women (Giddings, 1984) and first meeting of the National Negro Congress (Klein, 2018). In 1937, the Southern Negro Youth Congress began registering voters and organizing boycotts (Klein, 2018). With those activities the seeds of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s were born.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s

By the 1950s, the ongoing racial inequality, oppression, and terrorism of Blacks via anti-Black, state-supported violence forced segregation across sectors including the military, schools, housing, health care, and labor, forcing Blacks to rely even more heavily on each other for education, goods, services, and other necessities. The frustrations many Blacks felt finally reached a boiling point and were often expressed in Black churches, a cornerstone of the Black community, where it was frequently preached that oppression was a sin and protesting such oppression was sanctioned by God (Morris, 1984). The combination of those circumstances culminated into the start of the Civil Rights Era (Morris, 1984), a national social movement focused on seeking justice. There were nationwide protests and marches calling for and demonstrating unification, including the March on Washington in 1963. It also included the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, known to many as Bloody Sunday, which occurred on March 7, 1965. State troopers and county possemen attacked unarmed, peaceful marchers as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge with tear gas, clubs, bullwhips, and trampling them while riding horseback (Anderson, 2017; Franklin & Moss, Jr. 1988). The media was front and center to capture the events for all to see, including when dogs were sicced on, and water hoses forcibly directed at, peaceful protesters (McWhorter, 2013; Morris, 1984).

There were a number of landmark decisions by the Supreme Court such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954) which found that the "separate but equal" standard, previously set in Plessy v. Ferguson (1895), violated the 14th Amendment. Attempts to pass civil rights legislation failed every year between 1945 and 1957 and only after much delay, and the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. It declared discrimination was illegal in the United States of America on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. That victory was quickly followed by the 1964 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and in 1965, Malcolm X (Franklin & Moss, Jr. 1988). The combined efforts and movements from various individuals and organizations resulted in additional legal and policy changes, although not always practices, as indicated by redlining which enabled housing segregation to continue unfettered (Werner, Frej, & Madway, 1976) and ongoing efforts to suppress the ability of Blacks to vote (Anderson, 2017). Despite the losses and ongoing challenges, many in the Black community felt encouraged and that better times were on the horizon.

Better times occurred for some yet not others. For example, median household levels improved for Blacks, but the gap between Whites and Blacks widened (Pew Research Center, 2013). More Blacks were completing their high school education; however, they were still less likely than their White counterparts to earn a college degree (Pew Research Center, 2013). Interspersed throughout was also the dilution of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Anderson, 2017), the framing of the "War on Drugs" which created havoc in Black communities, the increase of Blacks in the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Alexander, 2012), and the continued segregation in housing which continued the devaluing of Black owned homes and challenges with becoming a Black homeowner (Rothstein, 2017). Recently disconcerting was the election of Donald Trump, following Barack Obama, which has led to an increase in white nationalist and white supremacist hate groups (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020), the president's race baiting and unwillingness to denounce such language or behavior (Koski & Bantley, 2019; Parker & Olorunnipa, 2020), and an increase in hate crimes against Blacks (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Twenty-First Century: Present Day

The events from the last century provide a context for understanding our current environment and highlight why current events might reverberate for some Blacks. Our country is at a crossroads and the convergence of negative experiences and outcomes are uncannily like those experienced 50 to 100 years ago. There are high rates of mortality and morbidity exacerbated by a pandemic, disproportionate unemployment levels exacerbated by the same pandemic, and anti-Black, state-supported violence. There is also the positive outcome of a growing civil rights movement as reflected in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, swept the world quickly and viciously. What began with the reporting of one case in December of 2019 of a pneumonia of unknown origin, has rapidly become a pandemic with worldwide total cases confirmed as of July 25, 2020 at over 15.7 million and deaths at over 638,000 (Gutiérrez and Clarke, 2020) and as of July 24, 2020 in U.S., total cases were just over 4 million and deaths at 143,868 (CDC, 2020). Like their experience with the Spanish Flu, Blacks are experiencing COVID-19 differently than Whites due to larger social inequities. When compared to Whites, they are at higher risk of contracting the virus and are more likely to die if they contract the virus (Goody, 2020; Ollove & Vestal, 2020). The disproportionate impact can partially be attributed to factors that also impacted Blacks during the Spanish Flu: poorer access to health care, preexisting medical conditions that increase risk of illness, the reliance for many on public transportation, a greater

likelihood of employment in positions that increase exposure to the virus, and ongoing residential segregation which causes some Blacks to live in more densely populated areas (CDC, 2020; Goody, 2020; Gould & Wilson, 2020; Ollove & Vestal, 2020). Additionally, Blacks often experience poorer treatment from health care providers; thus, when combined with their experiences with racism, stigma, and systemic inequalities, their vulnerability to negative health outcomes increases (CDC, 2020; Ollove & Vestal, 2020).

COVID-19 Recession

During the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009, Blacks experienced unemployment numbers higher than the national average, 16.8% and 10% respectively, those numbers did decrease to pre-recession rates in 2017 (Maxwell & Solomon, 2020) but that decrease does not reflect the overall impact. Many Blacks also experienced home foreclosures and lost up to 48% of their net worth—which was already at levels far below their White counterparts (Maxwell & Solomon, 2020). Those who did return to the workforce were often relegated to jobs with low wages, limited protections, and few benefits, including health insurance (Maxwell & Solomon, 2020). Eleven years later, Blacks are still experiencing the aftereffects and the COVID-19 Recession has been additive and led to worsening outcomes.

The temporary nature of unemployment experienced by many during the COVID-19 Recession versus the permanency experienced during the Great Depression is different (Iacurci, 2020; Zumbrun, 2020). In addition, overall rates are not as high; however, unemployment rates have increased, and the impact can be compared to the Great Depression (Kocchar, 2020).

In February, the unemployment rate for Blacks was 5.8% and by April it was 16.7%; with fewer than 50% of adult Blacks being employed (Gould & Wilson, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Blacks were laid off because they were less likely to be working in positions that allowed for tele-working and more likely to be working in service positions such as in retail, restaurants, and personal services (Maxwell & Solomon, 2020; Perry, 2019). They were also more likely to be working "essential jobs" (e.g. grocery stores, public transit, health care, child care, postal service, and warehouses) which ultimately increased their likelihood of contracting COVID-19 (Gould & Wilson, 2020) or working in positions without health insurance (Thompson, 2020). The resulting economic destabilization, from the COVID-19 pandemic has been similar to what Blacks experienced during the Spanish Flu pandemic and it further exacerbated pre-existing inequities.

Black Lives Matter Movement

COVID-19 has occurred at a time when our access to media, social and traditional, is at an all-time high. We can see and hear news from around the world in a matter of seconds. Most people have instant access to a camera and the ability to share video and their opinion to people who are known and unknown. We also have easy access to countless programming available through streaming and cable on a range of devices.

The by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the complete disruption of those new norms. We have little original television programming and our spring and summer sporting events were delayed with new ones just starting in July, months late. These changes have been combined with mandates in many places to shelter in place or self-quarantine. Thus, via television or a myriad of websites, many Americans repeatedly witnessed the murders of Ahmad Aubrey and George Floyd, and heard the 911 call made by the boyfriend of Breonna Taylor, after she was shot eight times by police and left to die in her own home. There is no doubt that each murder needed to be brought to light; however, the media turned each tragedy into fodder for the American public by repeatedly and casually showing them on television. That action has potentially further devalued their deaths and the deaths of the countless other Black men and women who have been murdered before and after them. Repeatedly hearing and watching each murder, has likely created a numbness and desensitization, like what is experienced when repeatedly watching any other image of violence (Mrug et al., 2015; Stafford, 2015). The message sent repeatedly to every viewer is that Black lives do not matter. Lest we forget, George Floyd was casually murdered on camera by a policeman after being accused of using a counterfeit $20 bill. Innocent until proven guilty in a court of law was not the default. State sanctioned violence was the default.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Global Network was founded in 2013, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the man who followed, shot, and killed Trayvon Martin a 17-year-old Black teenager who was walking home from his local store (Ramaswamy, 2017). Trayvon's murder inspired BLM's (2020) goal of building local power and intervening when Black communities were inflicted with state and vigilante perpetrated violence. Throughout the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, BLM's "mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes." Since its founding there have been numerous high (and low) profile murders of Black people by law enforcement throughout the country and BLM (2020) has continued to focus on "combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy".

Those efforts are the foundation of the current worldwide uprising demanding that Black Lives Matter be acknowledged, the words spoken out loud, and the concept embraced. There has been a dismissal of the cause with responses of "Blue Lives Matter" and "All Lives Matter". The president has even called a mural which was to be painted on the street in front of the New York Trump Tower, and depicted the phrase, Black Lives Matter a "symbol of hate" and said its existence would denigrate the street (Wagner & Ikowitz, 2020, para 1). The public demonstrations of support or solidarity by policemen, as well as everyday people, have been met with threats of punitive action. For example, the president of the Fraternal Order of Police (the police union) in Chicago stated publicly, "Any member of Lodge 7 who is going to take a knee and basically side with protesters while they're in uniform will subject themselves to discipline in the lodge up to and including expulsion from Lodge 7," (Sirott, 2020, 6:30). Employees at Starbucks were initially told they could not wear buttons supporting BLM although the company permits the wearing of, and distributes to employees that want it, paraphernalia to support LGBTQ rights (Murphy, 2020).

The murder of George Floyd has been identified as a tipping point for this current galvanization (e.g. Ifill, 2020; Abadi, 2020). Notably, in 2016 Colin Kapernick was penalized and ostracized when he began to kneel during the national anthem to protest racial injustice and when pressured by the press to speak he said, "There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder" (Branch, 2017, "A Quest for an Education," para. 21). "I am not looking for approval. I have to stand up for people that are oppressed" (Branch, 2017, "A Quest for an Education," para. 23). We now seeing that when others protest the treatment of Blacks in this country they are met with the same vehemence and even harsher treatment. Thus, only time will tell as to whether the current momentum will create necessary long-lasting change in the United States. What is clear is that we are witnessing a movement.

Guiding Principles of Social Work: Past, Present, and Future

As social workers we have a responsibility to not simply witness change, or tout mottos about change, but play a part in creating change. Our profession has its roots in a commitment to dismantle injustice. That commitment can be seen in the actions of social work pioneers who are frequently taught in social work history or policy classes such as Jane Addams, Mary Ellen Richmond, and Edith Abbott. It can also be observed in the accomplishments of pioneering Black social workers who were committed to improving the lives of Blacks, not as a by-product of helping everyone, but as a guiding principle. Many are well-known such as E. Franklin Frazier, Mary Church Terrell, Whitney M. Young, Jr., while others are lesser-known such as Birdye Henrietta Haynes, Lawrence Oxley, Lugenia Burns Hope, and Dr. George Edmund Haynes.

Ms. Haynes was a leader in the settlement house movement for Blacks in Chicago and New York (Carlton-LaNey, 2001). She "was never able, nor willing to separate her racial identity from her practice of social work. Race was a significant variable in determining the direction and extent of her career path" (Carlton-LaNey, 2001, p. 35). Mr. Oxley was a pioneer in social work training and public welfare work and even appointed to the U.S. Department of Labor by Franklin Roosevelt (Carlton-LaNey, 1999). Ms. Hope founded the Neighborhood Union which established settlement houses throughout Atlanta and focused on ensuring health care access for Blacks; she went on to serve on the faculty of the Atlanta School of Social Work, the first school of social work for Blacks (Frierson, 2019; Rouse, 1984). Dr. Haynes, co-founder and first Executive Director of the National Urban League, helped to establish the first social work training center for Black students at Fisk University and his support of Blacks obtaining social work education led to them studying at schools such as the New York School of Philanthropy and the Atlanta School of Social Work (Carlton-LaNey, 1994; NASW Foundation, 2019). Their varied responses demonstrate there is not just one way to respond when we see injustices happening to a disenfranchised population. It is simply essential that we respond or as John Lewis said, according to Barack Obama during his eulogy of him, "If you don't do everything you can to change things, then they will remain the same" (Obama, 2020, 32:28).

As social workers we are bound by the NASW Code of Ethics to, "pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people (NASW, 2017, p. 5). We should also "promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice" (NASW, 2017, p. 29). Our opportunities to engage in those mandates are plentiful. We continue to see attempts to limit Constitutional rights, such as the right to vote. For example, over 1200 polling locations have been closed across the South in Republican-led states, there have also been the addition of voter id requirements and shorter hours, impacting areas where Blacks primarily reside (Cohen, 2020; Salame, 2020; Sullivan, 2019). We continue to see disproportionate numbers of Black people jailed because of an inability to pay bail (Sawyer, 2019) or the need to assume extraordinary debt because they cannot afford monetary sanctions (Harris, 2016). Those consequences are directly related to the disproportionate contact of Blacks with the criminal justice system due to race and their higher likelihood of having

fewer financial resources (Harris, 2016). The time to act is now. We have agreed to "promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people," and "act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race" (NASW, 2017, pp. 29–30).

For those engaged as social work educators, the 2015 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015, p. 8), Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards mandate us to use our "understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels; and engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice." We perpetrate systems that have destroyed individuals, families, and communities and assisted in the promulgation of policies and practices that are to the detriment of Blacks in America. There have been recent calls from social work students around the country seeking the inclusion of a specific anti-racist focus in the social work curriculum, not just diversity or multiculturalism (alicitadelfina, 2020; Pitt SSW DO, 2020; UB-Social Work 2020). We must take heed and prepare future social workers to think broadly and deeply about the issues before us. As social work professionals we must stop being complicit in the discrimination, oppression, and exploitation of this country's Black citizens.

What Does that Word Mean?

Before moving forward, know the basics. Racism is not simply about your intentions or about your actions, racism is inevitable because this country was built and sustains itself on a foundation of racism. This does mean that you are not responsible for the individual actions that you engage in which perpetuate racism because you are responsible. It also means that you benefit from racism. If you are really invested in change you MUST seek to understand how you benefit and engage in new or additional behaviors that focus on dismantling racist systems.

Now that we are immersed in a world where we are being bombarded with a host of webinars to attend or bestselling books to read about racism and anti-racism, many of us are being exposed to words that we do not understand or are new. Here are three fundamental concepts to help you begin your journey. I have selected them because their footprint can be easily identified in the aforementioned history. They may also help you see how you have benefitted and been complicit.

Structural Violence

Structural violence exists because of racism. Its existence leaves Black people vulnerable to physical, socioeconomic, and psychosocial risks which result in health inequities and increased rates of morbidity and mortality (UIC-CHER, 2017). The outcomes from ongoing policies and practices that result in housing segregation, devalued housing, inadequately funded public education, higher unemployment rates, and poorer health are not because Black people do not try hard enough to have more or do better. It is because the foundation of our society is predicated on making sure that every White person, no matter how dire their circumstances, can look down on Black people. As Lyndon B. Johnson said, "If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you" (Moyers, 1988, para. 1). This ideology maintains structural violence.

White Privilege

White privilege is real and if you are reading this and you are White, yes you have White privilege, they are no exceptions. It does not matter how poor you grew up. It does matter if you were a first-generation student. It does not matter if the Black people you know live in bigger houses, have higher levels of education, and drive nicer cars. You have a privilege they do not have. Your White skin allows you as a parent of a young man or woman to not worry about whether a traffic stop will turn into their death sentence. It enables you to have your successes attributed to your hard work versus minimized and assumed to be the result of lower standards being applied when evaluating your work. It also protects you from being viewed as the janitor even when you are dressed nicely and standing in the front of the classroom preparing to teach your first class or assumed to be the store clerk when you are shopping and are not wearing a store uniform or a name badge. White privilege means that you are automatically afforded the benefit of the doubt and advantages unlike Black people.

State-Sanctioned Violence and Racial Terror

Since before the Slave Codes, Blacks have lived in a country filled with racial terror and state sanctioned violence. This reality continues. During colonial slavery, it was not only legal to beat, torture, and murder someone who was enslaved without consequence; in fact, it was an oft-employed strategy for subordinating Blacks (Franklin & Moss, Jr., 1988). After the demise of slavery, the Black Codes were enacted to legislatively create another system of forced labor for Blacks, as well as severe consequences when they were uncooperative (Franklin & Moss, Jr., 1988) including being whipped and sold on an auction block to the highest bidder (Anderson, 2017). During Jim Crow the federal government pulled federal troops out of the South and did not enforce

federal civil rights legislation (Alexander, 2012). The KKK was allowed to bomb, lynch, and use mob violence against Blacks (Alexander, 2012). Laws were designed and enacted that criminalized Blacks, allowing them to be arrested, and when they couldn't pay their fines be sold into forced labor where they were subjugated to "almost continual lashing by long horse whips, and those who collapsed due to injuries or exhaustion were often left to die" (Alexander, 2012, p. 31). During the Civil Rights Movement, Eugene "Bull" Connor, the Public Safety Commissioner in Birmingham allowed a mob of Whites to viciously beat a busload of Freedom Riders upon arrival at the Trailways station without any police intervention (Sitkoff, 1981). He also ordered students who were leaving a church preparing to engage in a peaceful protest to be attacked with billy clubs, water hoses, and dogs, all of which was broadcast to the world (Morris, 1984; McWhorter, 2013).

The ideology behind those attacks and unforgettable images have returned to our current discourse without fear of condemnation. We hear words being used that have not been spoken publicly in decades with purposeful wantonness so as to invoke and justify state sanctioned racial terror. We are witnessing state sanctioned violence used against peaceful protesters asserting their First Amendment right. On June 1, 2020, police used rubber bullets and tear gas to clear peaceful protesters so that President Trump could take a picture in front of St. John's Episcopal Church, across Lafayette Square (Rogers, 2020). Additionally, news reports began circulating in July of federal officers wearing camouflage and no clear agency identification, grabbing protesters peacefully demonstrating against police brutality, off of the street, whisking them away in unmarked vehicles, and holding them. When asked to comment about the actions President Trump remarked, "We've done a great job in Portland," "Portland was totally out of control, and they went in, and I guess we have many people right now in jail. We very much quelled it, and if it starts again, we'll quell it again very easily. It's not hard to do, if you know what you're doing." (Shepherd & Berman, 2020, para. 31).

President Trump also has a history of dog-whistling and using race-baiting language that promulgates the *we-them* dichotomy previously used during the creation of colonial slavery. As he has begun to struggle in the election polls (Pew Research Center, 2020; Enten, 2020) he is increasingly relying on these tactics as his primary strategy. On May 28, 2020, regarding clashes between protesters and the police, President Trump tweeted, "when the looting starts, the shooting starts" (Trump, 2020a). This same statement had been used in 1967 by the Chief of Police in Miami, Walter Headley, long known for leading a department which had amassed numerous complaints for their treatment of Blacks. Headly stated, "We don't mind being accused of police brutality" (Sprunt, 2020, para. 5) and focused his task force, which used guns and dogs, on the 10% of Black people residing in Miami (Wines, 2020). In his June 16, 2020 remarks in the Rose Garden when he signed his Executive Order on Safe Policing for Safe Communities Trump stated, "Nobody needs a strong, trustworthy police force more than those who live in distressed areas" (Trump, 2020b, para. 21). Note: the police are a legacy of southern slave patrols instituted to preserve slavery, prevent revolts, and catch those who had escaped from plantations (Waxman, 2017). Thus, because Blacks are more likely than others to reside in distressed areas, it is no wonder many see President Trump's language as coded. During a Fox interview on June 28, 2020 when asked about his message to African Americans he stated, "We have a heritage, we have a history, and we should learn from the history. And if you do not understand your history, you will go back to it again, you will go right back to it. You have to learn—Think of it. You take away that whole era, and you're going to go back to it sometime." (Kilmeade, 2020, 14:32). Many Blacks heard this statement as a veiled threat. That perception was only bolstered on July 1, 2020 when President Trump retweeted a video of a supporter shouting "white power" very clearly to protesters; his team denied that he'd heard the comment yet their response did not include a denouncement (Parker & Olorunnipa, 2020).

Those examples are just a tiny fraction of the numerous instances that the leader of our country has led the charge for, encouraged the use of, or failed to disavow violence against Black people. It is unnecessary for me to list the number of times that a police officer has not been charged with or has been acquitted of murdering a Black person in the "line of duty". There is no need for me to recount the thousands of Black people who have been subjugated to longer and harsher sentences than Whites for the same or sometimes an even lesser crime. Simply understand, when there are no punitive consequences, by default those actions are state sanctioned violence. Furthermore, because it is state sanctioned violence, it creates racial terror, such as what has been perpetrated against Blacks since their arrival in this country, by government entities and law enforcement who: (1) failed to intervene when Blacks were being terrorized, brutalized, and murdered by Whites, (2) protected the White perpetrators who engaged in such terrorism, and (3) enabled White mobs and terrorist groups like the KKK to terrorize, brutalize, and murder Blacks to their benefit (Anderson, 2017; Fairclough, 1987; Franklin & Moss, Jr., 1988). Remembering those facts, will provide you a clear understanding: Black people in the United States live in a world where state sanctioned violence creates racial terror and is the norm.

What Not to Do

Do Not Respond with "I am Color-Blind, I Do Not See Color"

Under no circumstance should you use a "color-blind" approach when interacting with or talking about Black people. This approach dismisses a physical attribute many Black people find beautiful and derive great joy and pride. It also dismisses a physical trait that has been and is still used to demean and denigrate Black people and deny them equitable treatment. If you choose not to see color, you are choosing not to acknowledge or understand how color is fundamental to white supremacy and impacts the everyday life of a Black person. It is color that is first seen when the decision is made to call the person by a racial slur. It is color that is seen when a police officer decides whether to engage in stop-and-frisk. It is color that is seen when a person decides not to rent to a possible tenant after meeting them, even when their rental history makes them a better option than other applicants. Viewing people from a "color-blind" perspective gives you the privilege of wrestling with that person's daily reality, a privilege Black people do not have.

Do Not Invalidate or Require Proof When Black People Share Their Experiences with Racism

When a Black person tells you about an experience they have had with racism, or how they think you have engaged in racist behavior, do not argue with them, tell them they are wrong, or spend your time trying to prove they are wrong. Remember, not only is perception that person's reality, they are an expert in knowing how racism looks and feels. Racism is "any prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power" (Oluo, 2019, p. 26). "Racism does not require conscious intent: actions are racist if Race is coded in them" (Rawls, and Duck, 2020, p. 1) and they "systematically constrain some individuals' opportunities and resources on the basis of their race or ethnic group" (Braveman, Egerter, & Williams, 2011, p. 387). Race is a social construct created from the *we-them* ideology that undergirded slavery (Kolchin, 1993). Thus, race is coded in the DNA of the United States.

The obvious skin color differences between Whites and Blacks enabled wealthy plantation owners to use a *we-them* ideology, create an unequal power structure between *we-them*, and divide and conquer *we-them* by empowering poor Europeans (we) to engage in white supremacist behaviors against Africans (them; Kolchin, 1993; Rawls and Duck, 2020). The perpetual inheritance for Whites is privilege. Inherent in that privilege is not having to be familiar with what racism looks like, how it benefits you, or how you are maintaining your privilege at the expense of someone else. Thus, if you don't see the racism that the Black person is telling you they see, you should take a step back and assess whether it is because acknowledging their truth will force you to question how you have benefitted from not being Black. Ask yourself, did you really earn what you have? Would you have earned it without a little family help? This might be as simple as your parents having owned their home which gave them enough credit worthiness to cosign for you to get a car. It might have occurred when everyone in your family contributed money towards your college application fees. Would you have made it this far without the police deciding that the little scrape you got into in high school was just a mistake and since you live in a "nice" neighborhood they would just let you go? The result of that decision is no criminal record which might inhibit your ability to get a job. These are privileges and "privilege has to come with somebody else's disadvantage—otherwise it's not privilege" (Uluo, 2019, p. 64).

Do Not Ask or Expect a Black Person to Speak for or Represent All Black People

Do not expect the Black person who you know, or are merely acquainted with, to give you lessons about the experiences of all Black people. In this country Black people are perceived to be a monolithic group. That viewpoint eradicates their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, national origin, level of education, generational status, place of residence, familial history in this country, etc. Not every Black person grew up poor, in an urban, gang-infested, violent neighborhood, without a father, and is a first-generation student. Let me be clear, there is absolutely nothing wrong with any of the aforementioned experiences, but they cross race and ethnicity, Black people don't singularly experience them. Hence, not every Black person can tell you what it is like to have those origin stories. If the person you know did not experience any or all of them, you also don't have the right to question their truth about their experience because of what you read in the latest bestseller or what you heard once from someone who was willing to be vulnerable and share their story. Just as your story does not represent all White people, their story does not represent all Black people.

Do Not Expect a Black Person to Educate You About Racism and Becoming Anti-racist

Do not expect a Black person to be your sole teacher about what it is like to be Black in America and experience racism.

They live with racism every single day. Asking them to recount their hurtful, and likely traumatic experiences, so that you can learn is no different than asking a victim of abuse to recount their stories just so that you can learn what it felt like. If you would not do the latter, you should not do the former. Does this mean you can never ask a Black person a question, no. But it does mean they have a right to say no. They have a right to be annoyed. They have a right to say, "It's not my job to educate you" and expect you not to complain if given that response because you have now decided you are ready to learn. The tricky part is this, you should also not rely on White authors as your sole or predominant source of material for learning about racism and how to be anti-racist. If you want to know what something looks like you obtain that information from the expert in the field. You wouldn't ask someone to explain to you how to accurately prepare for and successfully climb Mt. Everest and share how they feel making the climb and reaching the top if all they have ever done is watch a movie about the experience. They cannot describe from firsthand knowledge the toil it takes to physically and emotionally prepare for beginning the journey and what it takes to simply breathe and stay alive while trying to accomplish the goal, why should this be any different? Black people have been writing about racism and its impact since those who were enslaved began narrating and writing about the horrors of slavery stretching back to 1703 (Gates, Jr., 1987). Their writings have just simply been dismissed by the larger privileged society. Therefore, go to the source. I am not saying that White authors have nothing to contribute to our discourse, of course they do. What I am saying is that if their perspectives are your predominant source of information, perhaps you should accept that you might not be ready to hear hard truths about how a Black person sees the world and where you fit into that world. Only a Black person can tell you how it actually feels to be assaulted by racism.

What to Do

Social Work Practitioners

My charge to you is simple. If you are a White practitioner, be aware of the privilege you bring when you enter into your professional relationship with your Black client. Remember, the country where we reside was built on the degradation and devaluing of people who look like them. This does not mean that every Black person experiences life in America the same way. It does mean that you should be prepared, when they have an experience that they attribute to racism, not to discount what they say. Be ready to listen with openness not defensiveness or excuses. Yes, it may make you uncomfortable or come close to your reality. Choosing not to experience the discomfort is a privilege that Black people are not afforded.

Social Work Educators

If you are a White social work educator, you have a responsibility to ensure that racism, not just diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural competency or humility are acknowledged and taught in your program. It is not okay to think by discussing the latter that racism is covered by default. It is also not okay to think that you do not need a class that has an acknowledgement and understanding of racism at its core because you have a course about diversity or multiculturalism or because it is "infused" throughout the curriculum. If you notice that you have few or declining numbers of Black students in your program, or that those who are there are struggling, speak up about it, and lead an action to identify the problem so that it can be corrected. If you look around the room at your faculty and there are no, or only a few Black faculty, ask yourself why? Is your program or school not an attractive choice for someone who is Black or are they not being considered, interviewed, and hired. Either possibility requires interrogation and responsive action for change to happen. By residing in the United States, you are impacted by racism. To eradicate it we must all work to understand racism and the role we play in its ongoing, pervasive existence.

Social Work Researchers

If you are a social work researcher, you have a responsibility to include informed and engaged Black researchers on your team when studying Black people, and when studying all people. They have something to contribute. It is also not okay to use race as your control variable and pretend like experiences associated with race are equal and can be held constant. Nor is it okay to not look for differences by race and then conclude the differences that you find must be due to class or gender. Some of the biggest offenders of using this technique are those who conduct research in areas where Black people are disproportionately represented such as child welfare, special education, and the juvenile or criminal justice system. When conducting research about Black people you have a responsibility to your participants, and your work, to ensure that the research process is filtered through eyes that do not benefit from white privilege. Your Black participants do not benefit from white privilege. You have a responsibility to rely not on stereotypes about Black people or norms based on White people when you interpret your results and write your discussion section. If you use your research skills to engage in manuscript or grant reviews, do not decide that a study is weaker, or unworthy, because it only includes Black people. Most studies only

include White people and the question is never, "why did you not include Black people in your sample?" Hence, it should not be asked why White people are not included in a study about Black people.

Social Work Policymakers

If you are a policymaker, pay attention to the creation and implementation of policies. Are they really designed to ensure equal benefits to all, or will they only predominately help Whites because larger societal context and existing policies, practices, and mandates will nullify the intent of the policy or law? Ask yourself are you wanting this new policy to help Blacks because you think it is what they need or is it because the community who you partnered with is seeking to have implemented? Note, if you have not partnered with the community you should ask yourself, why do you think you are better equipped than those who will be impacted to make potentially life altering recommendations about their lives?

Conclusion

Black people are not victims. We have survived in this country despite the Middle Passage, enslavement, and the numerous other attempts to make us the footstool that everyone who is not Black or American Indian/Native American[1] (survivors of numerous attempts at Indigenous erasure) has the privilege of using to reach a ladder so they can climb unfettered and accomplish the American dream. If you are silent, you are complicit. If you fail to demand change, you are giving approval. If you fail to demand justice, just know, you are guilty, and you support injustice.

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[1] I have not discussed the plight of American Indian/Native Americans in this article. This omission was due to my great respect for their experiences in this country. I felt that any attempt on my part would inadequately distill those experiences into a few sentences. African Americans and American Indians/Native Americans share some history, but to even comment about that history would have require a level of robustness that I could in no way accomplish here.

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