

# IT'S GOOD TO SEE IN COLOR



BY  
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ASIAN

AMERICAN INDIAN OR  
ALASKAN NATIVE

BLACK/AFRICAN  
AMERICAN

HISPANIC OR LATINO

HAWAIIAN NATIVE/  
PACIFIC ISLANDER

WHITE

OTHER

Which box would you check? Why?

You might say it's based on your ethnic background or the color of your skin. But for those of us who check the box marked "white," I wonder if, subconsciously, it feels like the best answer.

This section, asking people to indicate their race, is commonplace on many documents and forms. But why?

"Fact: racially, we are almost completely the same. Ask an anthropologist. We are all, every people, less than .1 percent different," said Y. Jelal Huyler in a documentary called "Cracking the Codes."

It's true. When the Human Genome project was completed in 2000, it was found that humans have 99.9 percent of the same genetic code. So where did race come from?

"Race is the child of racism and not the father," writes Ta-Nahisi Coates in his book "Between the World and Me." In other words, race was born from the need to place people into a hierarchical system where some have more advantages than others.

Racism in America began during colonization, when European settlers enslaved both Native Americans and Africans. Then they developed a system to determine who could obtain citizenship, which was based on whiteness.

"To be white was to gain full rights as American citizens," said Torey Browne during a lecture at Marylhurst University.

The status came with benefits. It still does.

Currently in the U.S., Fortune 500 CEOs, Congress, the POTUS cabinet, mayors and governors are comprised mostly of whites, according to guest speaker Robin DiAngelo at the staff in-service at Clackamas Community College on Feb. 10. These are the people who have the money and power to make decisions.

It's called privilege. You didn't create it. You didn't ask for it. You may not even be aware of it. But, if you can check the white box, then you have it. I believe accepting this truth is the first step toward positive racial change in our country.

And where there is a privileged and dominant group, there must be a subordinate, oppressed group. Of course, this group is made up of those who do not call themselves "white."

"Racism still exists. Period," said Erich Pfeifer,

Clackamas sociology instructor, in an email. "So many white people, when they see a person of color, consciously or unconsciously, see their 'race' more than they see the 'person.'"

In her presentation to CCC staff, DiAngelo told the crowd about a study that the University of Chicago conducted. They sent out resumes, some with stereotypical white names and others with stereotypical black names, but otherwise identical. There were 50 percent less callbacks on names that "sounded" black.

"Who people are is on the inside, not the outside," said Pfeifer. "People of color deserve the right to be judged for 'who they are' and not 'what they are.'"

So, checking the white box means more job opportunities. Checking the white box means having the comfort of knowing that those in power share, and will look out for, your "race." And those who check the other boxes have a right to feel threatened.

But we have come a long way from the time when being white was the only way to gain citizenship and when blacks were enslaved in fields. So why can't we just get over it?

The way in which white ancestors plowed over people of other colors does not just go away.

Joy Angela DeGruy, a Portland-based educator, calls it "post-traumatic slave syndrome."

So what do we do?

In order to rebuild a society where the colors are equally beautiful, we must tear down the hierarchy we've spent so much time building.

"As white people, we have to learn to look past our limiting views of race, and instead see and respect the ethnicity and culture of the unique people we share our society with as equals," Pfeifer said.

DeGruy described a situation at a grocery store in which her sister-in-law, who is mixed race but appears white, spoke up for DeGruy as she was being harassed by the cashier.

"Kathleen knew that she walked through the world differently than I did," said DeGruy, "and she used her white privilege to educate and make right a situation that was wrong. That's what you can do, every single day."

So if you check the white box, I urge you to acknowledge your privilege and use it to help build equity for people of every color.