

BLACK

BY UNPOPULAR DEMAND

*The insidious function of covert racism
in Eugene's liberal white utopia*

WORDS & PHOTOS BY MEERAH POWELL

Walking along Broadway downtown on a Saturday night, you see a black man approaching from the opposite direction. You feel nervous — a split second of fear. Your instinct is to nonchalantly cross the street, but you know you can't, because you don't want him, or anyone else, to think you're racist.

You're not, right? Nah, you can't be. You live in Eugene. You voted for Obama, twice. You care about social issues, evidenced by the cool photo you Instagrammed from the Women's March. Hillary Clinton's description of young African-American men as "super-predators" bothered you.

I'm sorry to break it to you, but your guilty conscience doesn't mean you aren't racist.

When people think of racism, they usually think of overt racism: the word "nigger" scribbled on walls, hate crimes, hooded clansmen. But covert racism harms people of color, too. This more insidious form of racism functions through false notions of "color blindness" and the assertion that we live in a "post-racial" society.

Covert racism lives in the margins and manifests itself in knee-jerk reactions, like staring at person of color a little longer than you would someone else, or in the kind of overcompensating friendliness that's meant to prove you're not racist.

Living in the Pacific Northwest, it's easy to think racism doesn't exist here; it only happens in small, rural communities or in the South. But bias exists in everyone. It's the way society is structured.