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## Final Presentation

Hi everyone! I am going to talk this evening about racism, a topic which some of you may think I don't have enough experience with to say anything of consequence. And, for the most part, I'd say you were right, because when you think racism, you probably think about all of its terrible effects, too numerous to list, effects which I consider myself very lucky not to be afflicted by. However, I want to talk instead about the causes of racism and how we design our attack on this problem to better address these causes.

I think most of us would agree that the label 'post-racial' does not at all apply to our current society. I also think that everyone agrees that the goal of creating a 'post-racial' society is admirable and worthy of effort. However, I think that the trap we fall into in trying to achieve that goal is going about it at a societal level, i.e. imposing rules and regulations on institutions and large macro processes, and, while I think that these efforts are well-meaning and should be continued, they fail to address the root of the problem: the fact that individuals are racist.

To demonstrate this, I'm going to say something that I guarantee you have never any public figure or person in power say, something that

you've probably never heard someone say ever. I am racist. I am racist. I am. It's a terrible fact, one that I try to disprove every day, but the tenacity of this truth has forced me to surrender to it, and I have instead recently been focusing my efforts on mitigating the *effects* of my racist tendencies. I don't actively discriminate, I try to treat people as I would if they had any skin color, and I don't *think* I would have shot Michael Brown, but I did not get a perfect score on the Implicit association test, I sometimes catch myself reacting differently to people of different races in similar situations, and (allow me to be a little pretentious here and quote Joseph Conrad) I am very aware that "no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape the grim shadow of self-knowledge." I'm gonna let that one sink in a bit. The admission of my own racism has caused me to become hyper aware of my own actions, to constantly question if I would have reacted in the same way to another person if they had a different skin color, to check every action I do on past actions I believe were justified, and to justify to myself that an action I take is not due to my racist nature. Interestingly enough, (although I'm sure you all saw this coming), this has led me to be less outwardly racist, as I train myself to *force* myself to treat everyone as I would all others.

It is my personal belief that humans are innately racist; that, because we are able to recognize ourselves, we can recognize when someone does not look like us, and the primal circuitry that kept us alive when we all lived in tribal units labels that different person as an outsider, someone with perhaps ulterior motives, or, at the very least, less worthy of our compassion. By implication then, I also believe that there will never be a generation born in this world that is completely color blind, that the struggle against our racist nature will never cease. This is not meant to sound pessimistic, as I think we are perfectly capable of eliminating the almost all of the *effects* of racism through mass self-awareness as described above. However, even if you disagree, and you think that racism is a cultural problem and it is perfectly possible to have a generation of people who are not at all racist, this idyllic group of people is certainly not us (a counter-example is right here), and it is *certainly* not the generation that is currently running things.

So, regardless of your beliefs on the ultimate source of racism, I argue that racism exists on the most basic personal level, and, in order to attack this problem, we need to remove the current stigma not from racist actions but rather from the idea having racist tendencies, and

support efforts to eliminate the effects of racism at both the cultural and the personal level. We need to allow ourselves to have the idea that we can be both part of the problem and part of the solution; to admit that we are all, each individual person, whether it was ingrained in us either by evolution or by our cultural upbringing, we are all racist. This does not mean we are bad people, we just need to realize that there is something that we tend to do that we don't like, and the best way to fix this is not to deny that this is a part of us but rather be as aware of it as we can and not let it creep out in any aspect of our lives. I think that if we all did this, we would be on a much more secure and thorough path to ending the effects of racism.

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