

## INQUIRING MINDS

Topic: RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For decades there has been a call for a conversation on racism in this country. In most instances, it has been very difficult to have an honest, adult conversation regarding the issue of racism.

Acknowledging that this is a "loaded" topic, if such a discussion cannot be carried forward in a productive manner by

our group, "Inquiring Minds," where on Earth can one hold such a discussion?

Therefore, our challenge today, if we choose to accept, is to speak honestly and respectfully

regarding "racism," the topic of today. For clarity and structure, let us agree to the primary definition of "racism" provided by The AMERICAN HERITAGE

DICTIONARY, Second College Edition: "the belief that some races are inherently better than others."

Below we will find questions we may wish to consider:

- Is racism in the United States becoming more pronounced or is it diminishing?
- If you feel that racism in the United States has become more pronounced, why do you think this is true?
- If you feel that racism in the United States is diminishing

, what examples can you provide?

- Do cultures need an underclass to subjugate? Historically, has there ever been a culture without a subjugated group?

- If you had a magic wand, what steps would you take to eliminate racism?

- Do you believe that "equal opportunity" exists in the United States?

- What does racism in the United States cost its people in terms of the economy, social/criminal justice, and the dream of the "the shining city [country] on the hill?"

In addition to the attached articles, you may wish to read Ta Nehisi Coates' most recent book, BETWEEN ME and the WORLD,

Random House, 2015. This book presents a current picture of one man's perception of what it is like to grow up black in the United States of America.

## ARTICLES:

Article I.

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/24/us/rhttps://docs.google.com/document/d/15JFPp>

"RACISM IS a "BIG PROBLEM" to MORE AMERICANS"

Is racism on the rise? More in the U.S. say it's a 'big problem,' CNN/KFF poll finds CNN | 2015-11-24T12:51:57Z

(CNN)Debora Aust sees it in videos of recent police shootings. Alex Sproul reads about it in his Facebook feed. Sheryl Sims senses it when she walks down the street.

They are three Americans from three different demographic groups living in three different states. And they believe the same thing: Racism is a big problem. Their voices are just a few in a country of more than 322 million people. But they are far from alone. In a new nationwide poll conducted by CNN and the Kaiser Family Foundation, roughly half of Americans -- 49% -- say racism is "a big problem" in society today. The figure marks a significant shift from four years ago, when over a quarter described racism that way. The percentage is also higher now than it was two decades ago.

In 1995, on the heels of the O.J. Simpson trial and just a few years after the Rodney King case surged into the spotlight, 41% of Americans described racism as "a big problem." Is racism on the rise in the United States? Has our awareness changed? Or is it a problem that's been blown out of proportion? There's not a one-size-fits-all explanation for the shift. The survey of 1,951 Americans across the country paints a complicated portrait, highlighting some similarities across racial lines and also exposing gaps that seem to be growing. But this much is clear: Across the board, in every demographic group surveyed, there

are increasing percentages of people who say racism is a big problem -- and majorities say that racial tensions are on the rise.

'A different story' It caught Debora Aust by surprise. The 48-year-old white woman from Sterling Heights, Michigan, says she didn't expect racism to get worse. "It always seemed like it was getting better, like our generation was going to be better than previous generations," says Aust, who participated in the CNN/KFF poll. "But the TV started telling us a different story, with all of these shootings by cops." For Aust, whose father and uncle both work in law enforcement, the news stories she's seen about unarmed African-American men being shot by police have hit home. The officers should be held accountable, she says. "What's not helping is the police are getting off with a slap on the wrist. ... If it was me, and I was black, and this was happening in my community, I would be furious," she says.

The case of Walter Scott, who was shot in April by an officer in North Charleston, South Carolina, sticks out in her mind. The trial hasn't started yet. The officer's attorney says he plans to plead not guilty, and that race has nothing to do with the case. But Aust has already made up her mind. "I mean, give me a break, he wouldn't have done that if the man was white, and that's the problem," she says.

It's gotten worse, not better, since the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, says Ellis Onic. The 56-year-old engineer in Balch Springs, Texas, who's African-American, points to the 2012 shooting death of Trayvon Martin and this year's Charleston church massacre as examples. Time and time again,

Onic says, the justice system has failed. "The white man has had his way for so long, they don't think of it as racism. They think that's just the way it is. ... We have a long way to go, because the justice system is not right. Justice is corrupt," he says. "That's why she has the blindfold over her eyes and the scale slightly tilted, so you know that it can go either way."

Jim Bruemmer sees things differently. The white, 83-year-old retired advertising executive in St. Louis, who participated in the CNN/KFF poll, says media coverage alleging racism -- particularly when it comes to law enforcement officers -- has been overblown. "I am troubled by the bias I see in the media, that seems to spend all its time talking about the bad policemen and the bad white people and ignoring the crime and the disastrous conditions that are occurring in large segments of the black youth," he says. Bruemmer says he's had to look no further than a suburb of St. Louis to see that firsthand. "The belief is so universally held among the people I know, that the whole Ferguson thing was a farce," he says, "that 'hands up, don't shoot' was baloney, that the police officer behaved in a very proper manner and saved his own life, possibly."

Growing racism?

Gauging changes in racial attitudes is complicated, says Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, a professor of sociology at Duke University. Bonilla-Silva has a phrase he uses to describe the situation he sees today: "new racism." "After the 1960s and early 1970s, somehow we developed the mythology that systemic racism disappeared," he says. Racism remained, according to Bonilla-Silva, but became more covert.

"The main problem nowadays is not the folks with the hoods, but the folks dressed in suits," he says. "New racism," he says, has been decades in the making. But something has changed in recent years -- access to cell phones and social media. Accusations that police use excessive force, particularly against African-Americans, for example, now can get far more attention -- far more quickly -- than ever. Communities of color across the country can more easily connect, according to Bonilla-Silva, and people are picking up on patterns that scholars have long discussed.

In the news: Conversations about Racism without Racists  
"People are doing Sociology 101. They can connect Walter Scott, the assassinations of black folks in a church, the slamming of a girl in a school," he says. "And then it's across the nation. People are then connecting the dots and saying, 'No more.'" Growing awareness? While the trend of a growing percentage of people viewing racism as a big problem in recent years was true across racial lines in the CNN/KFF poll, the share who see it as a problem is notably higher among blacks and Hispanics. About two-thirds of blacks (66%) and Hispanics (64%) said racism is a big problem, while just over four in 10 (43%) whites said the same. Hispanics are much more likely now to say racism is a big problem than they were in 1995, when less than half responded that way. Among blacks, the share who said racism was a big problem dropped from 68% in 1995 to 50% in 2011, and now has climbed back to 66%. Majorities across races said tensions between racial and ethnic groups in the United States have increased in the past 10 years. Roughly a quarter said tensions

have stayed the same. Sometimes the way people view racism can play out like a referee's call in a baseball game, says Glenn Adams, a professor of psychology at the University of Kansas who has studied perceptions of racism. "Is the guy out or safe? Well, it depends who you're rooting for," he says. "Sometimes it's clear in either direction, but we tend to see it how we want to see it." It's likely the level of racism in the United States is more or less the same, Adams says.

### Race and Reality In America

"What's changed," he says, "is that more people are aware of it." Knowledge of history, having friends who've experienced racism and personal background are all factors that can contribute to a greater awareness of racism, he says. And now, he says, there's likely another factor at play. "People are more aware of it because of the videos of police violence and the media attention. Now, the media report on it," Adams says. "Black folks tended to know about this before. Now white folks are starting to know about it more. ... Now, with this kind of evidence, people have to re-evaluate their sense of what is true and what is not true, so it becomes a little bit harder for people to deny." The same goes for repeated incidents of racism on college campuses, Bonilla-Silva says, like the chant that shuttered a fraternity at the University of Oklahoma and the noose found hanging at Duke this year. It's impossible to dismiss cases as isolated events, he says, when similar situations at schools and other institutions keep happening again and again. "The fact that it keeps happening tells you that the problem is not a problem of bad apples," he says, "but perhaps the problem is the apple tree."

'We're all kind of in the same boat' Because of his complexion, sometimes people think Rick Gonzales is Italian. Sometimes they think he's Mexican or Middle Eastern. The experience, he says, has made him question the meaning of race. "It's obviously a label. Something tells me that we're all kind of in the same boat, yet we're separated somehow. We're given different names," says Gonzales, a 49-year-old truck driver from San Antonio, who participated in the CNN/KFF poll. Gonzales' mother is from Mexico and his father is from the United States. He says he feels that for people in power -- most of whom are white -- it's advantageous to pit groups against each other. And to him, it seems like no matter what, darker-skinned people are at a disadvantage. That, he says, is why race -- and racism -- remain big problems. "The ones that are usually getting the short end of the stick are the so-called minority ... but we're the majority, because we're always the ones who are struggling," he says. Sheryl Sims, an African-American, 59-year-old retired teacher in Atlanta who participated in the CNN/KFF poll, says that for her, racism is something she senses when she walks down the street in her neighborhood. "It's just the way people will shun you," she says, "or turn their head when you walk by." Things were worse 50 or 60 years ago, Alex Sproul says. But now, the 24-year-old, who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and participated in the CNN/KFF poll, says he sees racism lurking under the surface. From wage inequality to accessibility to jobs, Sproul says he feels minorities are still at a disadvantage. Sproul describes himself as mixed race Mexican American and white. He says several events in recent years have made him feel racial tensions are on the rise. One of them, he says, was the 2009 shooting death of Oscar Grant, an unarmed African-American man who was fatally shot by a

police officer on a Bay Area Rapid Transit platform. Sproul says he first learned about the case when he was scanning his Facebook feed and saw posts from friends. "You kind of see more of these situations, or extremes," he says. "I don't know if maybe it was going on before and there was no coverage, or if it's happening with greater frequency."

Love in the face of racism: Being an interracial family; too much hype?

Bruemmer, the retired advertising executive in St. Louis, says he sees racism as a big problem -- but not for the reason you might think. Too often, he says, leaders play the race card rather than addressing what he sees as the real issue behind many of the problems popping up in society today: broken families, particularly in the black community. "The massive problem that I see is that our leaders at the highest level, do not even want to recognize or even acknowledge that this problem exists, and therefore they spend huge amounts of time demonizing the police force, throwing gasoline and making the problems much worse," he says.

Racism is inevitable in any society, he says. But now, he fears that because of bad leadership, tensions are on the rise among some groups in the United States. "I think the racism and the hatred of the white race has grown to the point where it's worse than in the other direction. I think the anger and the racism is much worse from black to white than white to black," he says.

Searching for Common Ground

It's hard to draw a clear conclusion when the reasons behind respondents' answers to a survey question can vary so widely, says Mark Naison, a professor of history and African-American studies at Fordham University. "People may agree that racism is worse," he says, "and disagree profoundly on who the targets and victims are." "Simmering rage," he says, has been fueled by backlash after Obama's election, the economic struggles of lower- and middle-income whites and demographic shifts across the country. "Latent racism is becoming more open, because a lot of people are feeling threatened," he says. But Naison says he's also noticed a significant change in his classes.

"People are able to empathize, communicate and talk honestly across racial lines much better than they did five years ago, and certainly 10 years ago and 20 years ago," he says. Why? Naison says the changing world students are living in, full of far more multiracial families and friendships, has played a big role. A video of a police beating, he says, resonates for people now because they're not looking at those involved as strangers. "It's not just that guy over there," he says. "You could be beating my cousin or my boyfriend." The mix of "simmering rage" and growing empathy is a complicated equation, he says, that adds up to more people talking about race -- and racism. And it's a conversation, according to Naison, that isn't going away any time soon. If people from different backgrounds can open up about their concerns and find common ground, it could be a good thing, Naison says, like a therapy session on a national scale. "That conversation is difficult," he says. "But our history is difficult. Our present is difficult. We need to talk about it."

## Article 2.

### "THESE FIVE FACTS EXPLAIN AMERICA'S ENDURING RACIAL DIVIDE"

By: Ian Bremmer, TIME, June 29, 2015

Baltimore was 2 months ago. Ferguson was 8 months before that. And now Charleston. For many black Americans, there really are 2 Americas. As a thought experiment, we looked at the health, wealth & other stats on black America, & compared it internationally. The results show that America—all of America—needs to do much, much better.

1. Education: Education is supposed to be the great equalizer. The world may not be fair, but it's supposed to be a lot fairer w/in the 4 walls of a classroom. But the #s tell a different story. African Americans are twice as likely as whites not to finish high school. If white America were a country, its high school graduation rates would rank w/the likes of the U.K. & Finland; black America would be on par w/Chile & Poland. Black students are suspended & expelled at roughly 3 times the rate of their white counterparts. Of students who receive multiple suspensions, 42% are black; & 34% of students expelled are black. And the world they are sent out to isn't much kinder.

2. Wealth: What happens after high school? 21% of whites end up successfully completing a college degree, compared to only 13% of blacks. But even if they achieve that milestone, the

payoff is nowhere near the same. A white family at the median sees a return of approximately \$56,000 after completing a 4-year degree; a black family sees a return of around \$4,900. In fact, “black household wealth is just over the median wealth of an adult” in the Palestinian territories, which is not a comparison you want to see made about any group living in America in 2015. Looking at GDP per capita, blacks make \$23,000 compared to the U.S. national average of \$53,000. If black America really were its own country, it would be ranked 44th globally on that figure—between crisis-hit Portugal & postCommunist Lithuania. The most damning statistic? The median black household has just 6% of the total wealth (\$7,113) that the median white household has (\$111,146).

3. Health: No surprise, a less wealthy lifetime means a less healthy lifetime & it starts from the beginning. Infant mortality for blacks in America is 11.5 for every 1,000 births; the figure for whites is 5.2. Black Americans’ rates put them w/the likes of Mexico (12.58) & Thailand (9.86), whereas white Americans are much closer to Switzerland (3.73) & Japan (2.13). That’s how the racial disparity starts, but how does it end? Black Americans can expect to live a full 4 years less on average than whites, who on average make it to 79. A life expectancy of 75 years places black Americans below Tunisia, Panama, Costa Rica & Cuba.

4. Incarceration: From bad to worse: 1 in 3 black males will go to prison at some point in their life if current trends continue, compared to 1 in 17 white males. Women fare better, but not much—black women are incarcerated at (only) twice the rate that white women are across the country. Overall, blacks only

make up some 14 percent of the national population, but are 38 percent of the total prison population. If black America were its own country, it would rank No. 3 on the world list of absolute prison incarceration, ahead of Russia, Brazil, India and Thailand. And once in prison, it gets worse; 60 percent of all prisoners sent to solitary confinement are black.

5. Violence: America's homicide rate is a national tragedy—but it's much worse if you're black. White America's rate of 2.5 deaths per 100,000 is just somewhat higher than Finland (2.0), Belgium (1.7) & Greece (1.7). But at 19.4 deaths per 100,000 people, black America's homicide rate puts it above Burma (15.2) & just below Nigeria (20.0). But it's fatal police shootings where the figures become truly tragic. If you are a young black male in America today, you are 21 times more likely to be shot & killed by a police officer than if you are a young white male. If you're black, you're also more than twice as likely to be shot & killed by a police officer while unarmed. Over the past year, 41% of all unarmed people killed by police were black. America is better than this. It's about time we show it.

Moderator: Riv Swartz

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