**How Not to Be a Jerk 101 - part 2**

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[Content Note: Racism]

Just because someone doesn’t want to be racist doesn’t mean they aren’t. Contributing to white supremacy is racism. Supporting racists is racism. Excusing racism is racism. Not holding racists accountable is racism.

Racism is [a system of oppression](https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/resources/what-you-say-matters/what-racism) that permeates all levels of society and shows itself in invisible and in-your-face ways. But those things, those subtle acts or non-acts, are the stepping stones violence walks on. It isn’t always deliberate; it’s subtle, and that [stealthy prejudice](https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/transracial-adoption/responding-to-daily-microaggressions/) is where the blatant hate gets its strength. **The seeds of covert racist denial are the fertilizer for outright discrimination, brutality, and hatred.**

Sometimes racists are dressed in the white garb of the KKK, but they can also be dressed like your favorite aunt who volunteers at the soup kitchen. Racism is [subconscious](http://www.timesargus.com/article/20150920/NEWS03/709209899) and deliberate. Racism does not exist only in Nazi rallies, hate crimes or racial slurs. It exists in thinking that maybe black people need to stop pulling the [race card](http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/07/why-white-people-struggle-with-racism/). Racism says that people protesting police brutality are “just complaining” and **if they followed the law they wouldn’t get shot.** Racism is trying to tell a person of color what racism is. Racism isn’t based on [personal emotions](http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/02/how-people-whitesplain-racism/) (although they are tied up in it). Racism is an [entire system](http://www.advocate.com/world/2016/7/20/fighting-racism-where-black-folks-are-nearly-invisible) and spectrum of [inequality](http://blog.ncrp.org/2016/10/invisible-privilege-racism-chicagos-struggle-reconciliation.html) that disproportionately affects the lives of people of [color](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/color-blindness-is-counterproductive/405037/). Racism is claiming to [not see color](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/26/do-not-see-race-ignoring-racism-not-helping). Racism is subtle and stark. Covert and overt. Quiet and loud.

A pervasive argument breaking out post-Election Day 2016 is that voting for Donald Trump does not mean someone supports racism. But elections are a place where we can see this spectrum of racism play out in real time.

## Voting Can Be Racist.

President-Elect Trump’s campaign was powered by racist and xenophobic rhetoric. Hate groups such as the Klu Klux Klan have vocally endorsed Trump since the early days of his campaign. Trump, for his part, [did little to distance himself](http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/28/politics/donald-trump-white-supremacists/) from these blatantly racist terror groups. In January 2016, Trump [retweeted a white supremacist](http://fortune.com/donald-trump-white-supremacist-genocide/) and Nazi sympathizer with the username @WhiteGenocideTM. In February 2016, he retweeted another white supremacist. Days later, he retweeted yet *another* white supremacist.

When confronted about this and about the racist endorsements he had garnered, Trump did not outright distance himself from them. Additionally, official Trump campaigns and campaign staff across at least five states follow social media influencers that promote the fallacy of #WhiteGenocide.

Let’s go back in time and see other ways Trump has exposed himself as racist. [For decades](http://www.vox.com/2015/8/3/9089495/donald-trump-racist), Trump has spouted ignorant ideas about race in the United States. In 1973, the [Department of Justice sued Trump](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/01/nyregion/angered-by-attack-trump-urges-return-of-the-death-penalty.html) for violating the [Fair Housing Act](http://www.clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=15342) by discriminating against black tenants.

In 1989, five black teenagers were falsely convicted of a brutal rape of a white woman. In response, Trump ran full-page ads in newspapers across New York City with the all-caps headline “BRING BACK THE DEATH PENALTY.” In 2002, due to a confession and DNA evidence that matched another individual, the falsely convicted men were released and given large settlements. Trump’s opinion on the “Central Park Five” [remained hateful](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/donald-trump-death-penalty/420069/) when he continued to slander the innocent men by saying, “These young men do not exactly have the past of angels.” When asked again about his opinion on this in 2013, Trump [tweeted](http://fortune.com/2016/06/07/donald-trump-racism-quotes/), “Tell me, what were they doing in the Park, playing checkers?”

Trump’s racism is very much tied up in white supremacy. In 1993, Trump was at a Congressional committee hearing on the topic of gambling casinos ran by American Indian tribes, where he is [recorded making overtly racist remarks](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/01/how-donald-trumps-1993-comments-about-indians-previewed-much-of-his-2016-campaign/) implying there was organized crime in those casinos. He said he didn’t believe “an Indian chief is going to tell Joey Killer to get off his reservation” and, “if you look at some of the reservations you approved … I’ll tell you right now, they don’t look like Indians to me … Now, maybe we say politically correct or not politically correct, they don’t look like Indians to me, and they don’t look like Indians to Indians.”

He was vocally against the building of a Muslim community center in Manhattan in 2009. He insisted that nothing of the sort should be permitted within five blocks of Ground Zero. He even attempted to [buy out](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704644404575482093330879912) the project. His stereotyping seems to know no bounds. When he spoke to the Republican Jewish Coalition in December 2015, Trump made multiple remarks about the room being full of [negotiators](http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/trump-jewish-republicans-216398#ixzz3tkFOnhfX). The [stereotype](http://archive.adl.org/anti_semitism/jewsandmoney/) of Jews being tight with money has long been a damaging hallmark of anti-Semitism.

Fast-forward to the most recent decade, and Trump’s racist commentary has continued to pile up. In November 2014, he [tweeted](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/537157586316165120), “Sadly, because president Obama has done such a poor job as president, you won’t see another black president for generations!”

Repeatedly on the campaign trail, [he said](http://www.salon.com/2016/10/05/donald-trumps-white-supremacist-fantasies-inside-the-race-riots-all-across-america/) things such as:

“[African American communities](http://fortune.com/2016/09/26/presidential-debate-donald-trump-living-in-hell-black-people/) are being [decimated](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9bP8tyFpS0) by crime.” (September 26, 2016, Presidential debate)

“African Americans and Hispanics are [living in hell](http://www.salon.com/2016/09/27/a-memo-from-hell-donald-trump-says-i-live-there-along-with-millions-of-other-black-and-brown-people-but-heres-the-true-hell-donald-will-never-understand/). You walk down the street and you get shot.” (September 26, 2016, Presidential debate)

“[We see] [race riots](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/10/03/trump-says-race-riots-are-happening-every-month/) on our streets on a monthly basis. Somebody said don’t call them race riots, but that’s what they are. They’re race riots.” (October 3, 2016, rally in Colorado)

“African American youth … [have] never done more poorly. [There’s no spirit](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/donald-trump-says-african-american-youths-have-no-spirit-10342030.html) … killings on an hourly basis.” (June 23, 2016, Maryland GOP annual dinner)

Maybe you cast your ballot for Trump because you preferred what he said about gun rights or his stance on abortion. However, this says that those things are more important to you than challenging racism. Your vote declared that outspoken racism is not a deal-breaker. Maybe you barely paid attention to the racism of his campaign, or maybe you barely paid attention to the campaign at all. Whether intended or not, voting for Trump gave a green light to those who agree with the hateful rhetoric that carried his campaign. It gave a pass to racism and bigotry.

It also let Trump know that his base of supporters won’t hold him accountable for white supremacy.  Trump [has appointed](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/13/501937200/trump-taps-reince-priebus-as-chief-of-staff-steve-bannon-as-chief-strategist) Stephen [Bannon](https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/graphics/2015-steve-bannon/) to serve as chief strategist and senior counselor. Bannon is an outspoken white nationalist and major player in alt-right media [propaganda](http://www.dailywire.com/news/8441/i-know-trumps-new-campaign-chairman-steve-bannon-ben-shapiro).

## Racists Aren’t 100 Percent Terrible Humans.

Upholding and strengthening [white privilege is racist](https://star.txstate.edu/2016/02/15/black-people-cannot-be-racist-and-heres-why/). Someone can be kind and giving and have a plethora of diverse friends and family whom they love earnestly and still harbor subconscious racism. Even if they are aware of it, if they do nothing to counteract the systems of [white privilege](http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/07/8-things-white-people-race/) and supremacy they benefit from, that’s racism. **There are racist implications even the most** [**woke white person**](http://www.damemagazine.com/2016/06/27/what-it-really-means-be-woke) **can’t escape.**

I am a card-carrying benefactor of white privilege. One of those privileges is being able to play nice and look away from the damage, because the damage of racism isn’t happening to me. But ignoring it and denying the severity of racism’s impact only buys time for the roots to dig deeper.

## White Privilege Comes With Responsibility

That doesn’t make white people *bad people* or inherently evil, and it doesn’t mean that white people must wallow in guilt for the sins of racist history. What it does mean is that with privilege ought to come responsibility: the responsibility to be honest about what happened in the past and what is happening in the present. The responsibility to go dig up the roots of racism, because white people have easier access to the fields where it has grown.

It is uncomfortable and — to be quite honest — painful to have to [admit](https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0806625767) you have been racist. It is not easy to look into the glaring light and see the ways in which you’ve been a hypocrite. But that’s the only way we grow. (Spoiler alert: we’re all full of contradictions and hypocrisy, admit it to yourself before someone points it out and you’re way ahead of the pack). I speak of myself, too. I am part of this. We all are.

It’s important to challenge denial. We can work on enacting change only once we give the problem a name and become [willing to accept](https://books.google.com/books?id=wlrckmltFA0C) that name even when it makes us uncomfortable. Placating people is what makes us all comfortable in our [internalized prejudices](http://qz.com/656159/the-scientific-way-to-train-white-people-to-stop-being-racist/).

Once we acknowledge the threads of racism that crisscross the fabric of our society, once all of us concede to bear witness to the deep current of prejudice running under all of us, only then can we start to dismantle the structure of oppression that gave rise to this divide.