

ARE YOU A RACIST?

This would be a good time to phone a trusted friend for support in unpacking your thoughts. But please, do not solely run to your best Black friend.



Many of you will come to consider the summer of 2020 as the time that you became introspective about race in America. You're asking questions, reading books and articles, and sharing memes. You are really trying to grapple with the idea of systemic racism and its impact on your friends, neighbors, and coworkers. You're asking the very relevant question: **Am I a racist?** And you reach the conclusion that you are not because you believe that everyone is equal.

You breathe a sigh of relief, pat yourself on the back, and return to your business as usual. But hold on, friend. Let's unpack this a bit more. While you may not, indeed, be a "text book" racist, you're not off the hook just yet. You see, the word "racist" rests its hat on a key premise: the belief that one's race is superior to others. Let's look at your biases and prejudices. That off-color joke you laughed about at the office holiday party with your trusted buddies? Racist. Wondering what that Black person did or didn't do during their encounter with law enforcement to get harassed, arrested, or killed? Racist. Noting to your Black friend that he's not like a "Black" Black person? Racist. Telling people that you don't see color? Racist.

Prejudice is a preconceived judgement or opinion, or an adverse opinion or learning formed without grounds or before sufficient knowledge. Bias is a personal and sometimes baseless judgement. Take a deep breath. All hope is not lost.

"Racist" has become the catch-all word that encompasses personal and ill-informed biases and prejudices. This is where introspection has to start to get a bit deeper. If you are serious about making the world a better place, you have to start asking the deep, foundational questions: What are my biases and prejudices? Why do I think the way I do? Where did I learn these ideas and values? Yep. We just peeled back the first layer of a complex, homegrown onion. But you can't stop there. Once you've identified your biases (and we all have them!), you've got to ask the tougher questions: How has this belief served me? Have I discredited or ignored someone because of these beliefs?

This would be a good time to phone a trusted friend for support in unpacking your thoughts. But please, do not solely run to your best Black friend. While they would love to know that you are soul searching and seeking answers, it is important that White people have these conversations with other White people. In fact, there are bound to be experiences and ideas that only other White people will readily understand. Use that time to sift through and evaluate your perspective, then engage the people of color that you trust most. Courage is more important than correctness with conversations about racism, and trusted friends will appreciate that courage.

After the breakdown and the breakthrough, continue to do the work. Find opportunities to learn more and do more. Explore concepts like systemic racism, White privilege, implicit bias, and microaggressions. Learn the varied yet singular histories of people of color in America, then join others in the work to make America a place that truly offers liberty and justice for all.