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Systemic Racism

Did you know that white families hold ninety percent of the national wealth? On the other hand, African-Americans are twice as likely to be unemployed because of how their name sounds, and they are also eighteen times more likely to be tried as adults when they are children. You may think that these are all unrelated facts, but they all have one explanation: systemic racism. Systemic racism is defined by Dr. Nicki Lisa Cole, Ph.D as, "...intersecting, overlapping, and codependent racist institutions, policies, practices, ideas, and behaviors that give an unjust amount of resources, rights, and power to white people while denying them to people of color." Essentially, systemic racism is racism in government and private institutions, policies, rights, and "norms" that give power to white people, but not to people of color. Systemic racism is not very well known and affects many people's human rights every day.

There are many stories of how systemic racism has affected people. One of these is about a Brazilian domestic worker named Creuza Oliveira. When she was just ten years old, Creuza Oliveira dropped out of school to start working. At her workplace, she was called incriminating names and subject to physical abuse. Four years later, she was taken to São Paulo without any consent from her parents. Creuza Oliveira wasn't paid with currency until she was twenty-one. She was paid in food and clothing before she came of age. One day, Creuza heard a radio story about domestic workers fighting for their rights. She was inspired to attend a meeting, and began her journey into the domestic workers' rights movement. Creuza Oliveira is now the President of

the National Federation of Domestic Workers in Brazil. Domestic workers have gained many rights they should have received from the beginning, but there is still much more to be done. To quote Creuza Oliveira, "Domestic work in my country still carries the legacy of slavery: lack of application of relevant laws, physical and moral violence, lack of recognised rights vis-à-vis other professions, lack of union rights, and so on." The human rights that were violated by the Brazilian government and some of its citizens are Article 1: the right to equality, Article 2: freedom from discrimination, Article 3: the right to life, liberty, and personal safety, Article 4: freedom from slavery, Article 5: freedom from torture and degrading treatment, Article 6: the right to recognition as a person before the law, Article 7: the right to equality before the law, Article 23: the right to desirable work and to join trade unions, Article 24: the right to rest and leisure, Article 25: the right to adequate living standards, and Article 26: the right to education. All of these rights are from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Khalid Hussain is a Bihari from Bangladesh, a group that are not recognized as citizens in what they consider their home country. They are forced to live in cramped camps with few utilities. The Bihari are segregated and ridiculed, even in primary education. The government will not let them go to the public high school, so their only choices are to go to a private school they cannot afford, or end their education at the primary level. Khalid Hussain explains that the Bihari have to take up certain jobs, like craft workers and drivers, because they are excluded from other, better jobs. To quote Khalid Hussain, "...we have no access to any means of survival in society - socially, culturally and economically". Realizing that change needs to occur, Khalid Hussain fights for recognition. He and a group of Bihari in 2003 achieved a breakthrough when

they challenged the election commission's refusal to include the Bihari in voting. The ruling was that the Bihari are Bangladeshi citizens. Even though that victory helped many Bihari, there is still work to be done. The Bangladeshi government and some of its citizens violated Article 1: the right to equality, Article 2: freedom from discrimination, Article 6: the right to recognition as a person before the law, Article 7: the right to equality before the law, Article 15: the right to a nationality and the freedom to change it, Article 21: the right to participate in your government and its elections, Article 23: the right to desirable work and to join trade unions, Article 25: the right to adequate living standards, and Article 26: the right to education. All of these rights are also a part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For an expert opinion, I am using a conversation between Joe Feagin, a sociologist and a leading researcher of racism in the United States for more than 40 years, and George Yancy, a professor of philosophy at Emory University. Joe Feagin discussed how there is a "white frame", a system that white people use to get ahead, which includes issues like prejudice and bias, but also institutional and systemic racism. He pointed out that almost eighty percent of the U.S.'s history has had slavery or segregation in it, which means that the systems put in place didn't disappear in the fifty-three years since the Civil Rights Act was passed. Also, most white people, according to Professor Feagin, don't realize that systemic racism is giving them privileges, and instead believe that these benefits came to them because they worked harder for them, or they have greater intelligence than the other person. He also states that many white people think they worked harder than other people for what they got, but they actually socially inherited enrichments such as money, land, home equities, and social capital from previous white

generations. It is also discussed that we still live under a constitution made by white slaveholders, which contributes to systemic racism in the U.S. The final point of the discussion was how systemic racism is put into some white children's minds at a young age. Both the parents and sometimes preschool teachers contribute to this unjust situation.

I believe that Joe Feagin gave a very good overview on how systemic racism exists, how it was implemented in the U.S., and how people keep it alive. Although some may disagree with how systemic racism gives them advantages over people of color, they need to realize that this happens more than they think. As Joe Feagin said, "Most whites think racial inequalities reflect differences they see as real — superior work ethic, greater intelligence, or other meritorious abilities of whites. Social science research is clear that white-black inequalities today are substantially the result of a majority of whites socially inheriting unjust enrichments...". This quote shows that even though you might not think that you have privilege, you actually do but may not just realize it. Joe Feagin also discussed how systemic racism has been in the U.S. since the U.S. was created. This shows that systemic racism is still alive and well, but hiding in the shadows of ignorance. The final point that is touched on is the implementation of systemic racism into children's minds at a young age. We as a country need to do a better job of educating children to not have biases and racist behavior towards other races. If we do this, then we solve a key role in stopping systemic racism.

There are many action steps that can be taken to stop systemic racism. One of them is to change laws and other policies which support systemic racism. The way to change them is to

bring attention to them. If petitions are signed, protests are marched, and awareness is raised, then someone in a position to change those laws and policies will speak up. Speaking of people in power, another way to stop systemic racism is to elect people to power positions who will help eradicate systemic racism. If the right people are elected, then they can play a crucial role in helping those who do not have a strong enough voice in our political system. Another step that needs to be taken to end systemic racism is educating people about its existence and how it is wrong. People should hear this opinion, even if they don't agree with it, because it just might change your mind. For the people like me and many others who disagree with systemic racism, stand up against people who are using it to their advantage. The whole situation is wrong and needs to be stopped immediately. The final step is to have a voice. This situation is just like the quote, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." by Desmond Tutu. By saying nothing, all you are doing is helping those who use systemic racism to their advantage.

In conclusion, systemic racism is the system used by white people to gain and keep an advantage over people of color in many aspects of life. Systemic racism can take many different forms, but it always has one result: the violation of many human rights. It is real and still is in many of the institutions set up by the government and in private organizations. Steps to help end systemic racism include ending laws and other government rules that support it, electing the right people into positions of power that will help end it, educating people about systemic racism, to stand up to people who use systemic racism for their advantage, and to raise your voice. Systemic racism is a real thing, and it is violating people's human rights every day. More

attention needs to be brought to this so it cannot expand any farther. Always remember that even if systemic racism doesn't affect you, it still affects millions of people. This is why systemic racism needs to be addressed.